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# THE NORMO-SAXON

PENFOLD

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period, 1066-1154 — Fiction

2. Fiction, Canadian

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THE NORMO-SAXON  
OR  
A ROMANCE OF ENGLISH HISTORY

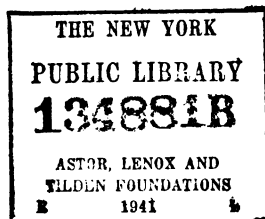
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## NOTE

The spelling of the names of persons, titles, places, mountains, and rivers pertaining to the Dark Ages varies so much at every period and by each writer, that to make the reading easier and more intelligent the simplest and most modern words have been used in the pages of this book.

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# THE NORMO-SAXON

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## CHAPTER I

**I**N an epoch almost cut in twain by the advent of Alexander the Great and Napoleon, came Charlemagne the Greater—greater because, while the first two waged cruel and merciless wars, marked by unstemmed victories and the blight of human hopes, Charlemagne, equally successful in arms, left in his trail from the Rhone to the Danube law, order, civilization, and Christianity, instead of chaos and desolation,—a Christianity, too, stripped of some of its superstition and much of its outward show, replaced by no uncertain quantity of the primitive teachings of Christ.

These changes in religious matters, however, were not made without more than a modest protest from the Roman Pontiff, as well as the dissenting voice of the principal of Charlemagne's own great school

of learning. Viewing him from every side of his greatness, one conclusion only can be reached, that he was an instrument in the hand of Providence to lift the human family to a higher and purer plane of life, to raise the cross in its path and stay the onward march of barbarism, to open the eyes of swarms of lawless humanity and point them the way to Christ.

He also became the agent of an equally great if not a greater work, in using his dauntless armies as a breakwater against the tidal wave of Mohammedanism, which in his day threatened to overrun the whole of Europe.

While Charlemagne planned and carried out with success the most gigantic military campaigns the world ever saw, war was not the achievement for which after generations should honor him most. Before war had claimed much of his time or talent, he had built up within his own court one of the most advanced and liberal schools of learning to be found in all Europe; where not only the word of God in its purity was taught, but where practical knowledge in all branches of government, civil law, culture, and refinement were made special objects of discussion and study. While the doors of this school were thrown wide open to all comers, it was



no less the great mental and spiritual feeder for every member of the King's court and that of his own family, not one of whom was more punctual and attentive to its teachings than Charlemagne himself, who bitterly felt the neglect of learning in the early years of his own life.

Wherever his military camp was pitched there was found this academy of learning, and no royal command was more rigidly enforced than that no day should pass when the lessons at this school should be neglected. Without regard to nation or rank, men, the most learned as well as the most godly, were sought as teachers of this great cosmopolitan college.

Prompted by such noble aims, it should create no surprise that all Europe soon bowed before this man, and made him Emperor of the West; indeed, it would seem that this crown was placed upon his head by the *Divine Hand* for a *Divine* purpose.

By one of the chances of good fortune, Charlemagne met at Parma, on his way from Rome to England, Alcuin, probably the most profound and brilliant scholar of his time, and prevailed upon him to become the controlling power of his school.

Alcuin was English by birth, and to Egbert, Archbishop of York, he was indebted for that

thorough education which his great natural gifts enabled him in after life to put to such practical use, and display with such eminent lustre. So close became the relations between Alcuin and the King, that he was more than once chosen his envoy to foreign courts on missions of great moment, notably that to the King of Mercia. The last year and almost the last month of the eighth century had been reached. For thirty-two years Charles had scarcely seen a day of peace. War in some part of the great empire over which he was now master had ever raged with bitter fury. First with a disgruntled king; then against a swarming horde of barbarians who had entered his territory from the North; next the Saracen host from the East assailed him to destroy, root and branch, the tree of Christian faith, of which he was the fearless champion of the West.

The cloud of war had at last vanished from his sky; he sat in his palace at Aix-la-Chapelle in calm, deep thought, looking back upon his life—more like a terrible dream than a reality—fraught with such potent changes in the world's history. He was no doubt musing over the coming event of receiving the crown as Augustian Emperor of the Romans, on the Christmas Eve almost at hand.

His page announced that a lady of apparent dis-

inction desired a word with the King, handing him a card upon which was written *Edburga*. Charles fixed his eyes upon this card long enough to read a note of some length before he told his page to admit the caller.

A lady of charming beauty was shown into his presence, whose face bore the marks of great distress. She was evidently not an entire stranger to Charles, for on entering he received her with an air of somewhat intimate acquaintance. "You have grown stouter since I last saw you," were the words which followed the King's first greeting of his visitor. Her answer was in the strange dialect of her own land.

"I have with me a much beloved and honored countryman of yours whom you should meet," said Charles, as he turned to the page and directed him to summon Alcuin.

While not a stranger to the Saxon language, the King was far from thorough in his knowledge of the provincial tongue as spoken in Saxon Britain. The lady being no other than Edburga, wife of the late King Beortric of Wessex, whom she had recently poisoned by accident, he thought it would be safer to have a perfect English scholar present at the interview. It was this, more than his desire to

have them meet, that prompted his sending for Alcuin.

The news of Edburga's crime had preceded her over the Channel. When Alcuin entered, he beheld for the first time a woman of whom he had heard so much. With his searching eye he seemed at a glance to take a complete measure of his ill-fated countrywoman. He was looking upon a lady not over thirty years of age; neither tall nor stout, with a heavy growth of hair, in which there was more of the light Saxon in color than the shade of auburn which was present on closer inspection. Her face was in shape like that of a plump, half-grown girl, soft and delicate; and upon her cheek was the blush of innocent maidenhood. Her eyes showed neither the deep blue of the Saxon, nor the sparkling black of the native Britain; they were in color a cross between the sloe and the hazel, whose look bespoke the conqueror of hearts.

She sat in a chair close to the King, and had thrown aside a long loose garment, not unlike the old Roman toga, now almost tabooed by fashion, displaying her shapely figure in the uniform of a court page. The look of sadness and stare of fright upon her face rather increased than marred her beauty, on which nature had left its classic impress.

These were the musings of Alcuin before he broke the silence by saying: "The ladies of Britain seem to have changed their mode of dress since I left my native land. I notice Queen Edburga is robed in the uniform of a court page." This remark brought a deep blush to the lady's face and a tear into her beautiful eye. The dramatic answer of the Queen showed that she was quite as ready in speech as she was attractive in person.

Rising from her chair and casting her moistened eyes first upon the King and then upon Alcuin, she exclaimed: "Oh! those terrible brutes, they would kill me! The mob broke down the palace gates, forced open the doors of the palace itself, rushed into the building with stones and cudgels, howling like demons, 'Where is the woman who killed our King?' They smashed everything of beauty within its walls; wrecked the furniture; crept into every nook in search of the ill-starred Edburga. Even in this disguise I barely escaped from the castle with my life. They drove me from the island like a hunted deer." As she resumed her seat, flushed and exhausted, she looked the creature she had described, the hunted deer.

If his visitor was beside herself with emotion and fright, Charles at this moment was the very oppo-



site. Looking into her face with a calmness as if in mockery of the scene just ended, he said :

“ So the people sacked your palace after the murder of Beortric ? Well, do you wonder at their righteous anger, and their set purpose to avenge so black a deed ? No action on their part could be more natural or just. The people would be slaves indeed, if they did not repay their hornet rulers in their own stings once in a while. Think of seven kings spitting at each other like angry cats, ruling an island not much larger than a Frankish sheep pasture. Each one master over a few hides of land, scarcely enough to raise the leeks for his own table. With a good bow it would not be a hard task for each proud monarch of the island to shoot an arrow quite across his own domain.

“ Edburga, you will recall the boy whom your father Offa, possibly aided by his daughter, drove from the island many years ago, who took shelter under Charles’s roof ? ”

At these words the woman’s eyes lit up with keen interest: “ Ah! you mean Egbert, do you not ? ” “ Certainly,” replied the King. “ Egbert has been schooled at my court in the art of bringing order out of chaotic kingdoms, and in taming hot-headed kings by relieving them of their

heads, if found necessary. So your treachery and crime, after all, will place good Egbert on the throne of Wessex, giving to the island, we hope, a king who will put an end to its anarchy by ridding it of a swarm of regal bandits, who pass their time in the active trade of cutting throats."

Dropping the severe tone in which he had just spoken, Charles exchanged a wink with Alcuin, and then continued in a vein of quiet humor:

"So Queen Edburga would wed the old Frankish King or the young prince, which?"

"I would wed the prince, I dare not aspire so high as to win so great a monarch as Charlemagne."

With a laugh he answered: "I see, it is the young blood that attracts Edburga more than the old crown."

With an air, too serious to be assumed, he continued: "But do you not think that she, who could mix a cup deadly enough for Beortric and his friend, could quickly rid the world of Charlemagne or his son?" Edburga looked as uneasy as she looked guilty, and covering her face with her hands remained so, while these last words of the interview were spoken. "The poisoned cup which you prepared for your hated guest, did not God put into the hand of your husband, to show you the terrible devil within your own heart?"

These words were too much for the guilty Queen ; she burst into a flood of tears, and was led out of the presence of Charles by Alcuin and the court attendant, never again to meet him.





## CHAPTER II

**A**N hour after Queen Edburga had gone forth from her audience with Charlemagne, with such a heavy heart, to become a wanderer upon the face of the earth, like Cain of old, there met in the room which she had left the same number of persons, only Egbert had replaced Edburga at the King's right.

For more than a dozen years Egbert had been an exile from England—if the use of this name may be allowed,—driven from thence by the intrigues of Offa, King of Mercia, Edburga his daughter, and Beortric, whom she had married. Egbert then claimed the kingdom of Wessex over Beortric; hence his unjust persecution. Under the sheltering roof of Charlemagne this young prince had been treated with the tender and loving care of a son, rather than that of a crownless head seeking the refuge of sympathy.

Year by year the attachment between the great

Frankish King and young Egbert grew stronger and stronger. At many of his councils, both of war and peace, young Egbert was present, and to no one would Charles turn with greater deference for an opinion than to his youthful ward. That the latter learned to love Charlemagne with an affection far deeper than that for a great monarch and protector is natural indeed. He became to him, in all respects, his parent, whose advice was ever sought on all matters of a personal nature as readily as those of public welfare, and which was always given with the freedom and tenderness of a father.

Egbert came to Charles an untutored and semi-heathen youth, in which condition he would have made a weak king for the West Saxons. He was now a stalwart Christian, thoroughly informed, not only on all matters of progress in the art of war, but also possessed a knowledge of civil government in its broadest sense, as well as the higher grades of education, which Charlemagne at his great school alone could impart, notably under so able a teacher as his senior and countryman, Alcuin.

The unlooked for visit of Edburga had somewhat trespassed upon the hour named by the King for meeting Egbert and Alcuin to talk over the parting

of the two friends, which was only a few hours distant. The time taken up with the Queen, therefore, was a season of suspense to the coming King of Wessex, who during Alcuin's absence was wrapt in deep thought, brooding over the task which lay before him; and especially did he pass in mental review his long and valuable experience in the service of Charlemagne.

First flashed vividly before him the rapid march against the stronghold of the King's ever-rebelling enemy, the Continental Saxon. He was looking with wonder upon that vast army of warriors, who never knew defeat, falling upon the defiant foe with such deadly effect with battle-axe, sword, and spear, sheltered under their kite-shaped shields, slaughtering them in numbers so great that a passage amongst the dead and wounded was next to impossible.

The terrible solemnity of this scene of slaughter was rendered doubly impressive by the slow and stately march of the great band of priests, singing their hymns of conquest, as the glittering swords mowed down the enemy like grass. This unfortunate people was finally subdued only by exchanging their territory for that of an alien race, sending the Saxon many miles from his own home, and bringing the people of his new land to take his place in

Saxony. From the Saxon fields bathed in blood, Charles and his victorious army, like silver-winged midgets, in 774 scaled the mighty Alps, and fell with terrific force upon the defiant Lombard king, who, laying his crown at his conqueror's feet, sued for peace upon his bended knee.

So Charles once more turned his back upon the prostrate Saxon, and sped south over the Carpathian heights, to deal a like crushing blow to the lawless Avar (Hungarian), and rid that land of its nests of savage thieves.

Thus rambled the half-dreamy thoughts of Egbert over the years spent in the Frankish kingdom, while he had marched at the head of one of Charlemagne's legions, a witness to the final conquest of every foot of ground from the Eider to Sicily, and from the Ebro to the Theiss—casting in the shade the glories of United Germany of the present day,—when he was summoned to the King's presence. Charlemagne began the interview by the terse method of dialogue made famous in his school by Alcuin, its promoter.

“So to-morrow, my son, you will leave Charles's parental roof?”

“Only on one condition, that it is the King's wish that I do so.”

“ Where is Egbert’s ambition to ask my consent to become my equal ? ”

“ Your equal I can never become.”

“ What! Will you not become as great a king on the island of Britain as I am on the south side of the Channel ? ”

“ I might become so had I Charles’s inbred talent of greatness. I would rather, however, be an honored prince in his service than a weakling king in Britain.”

“ With the soldier’s eye of Charles and the scholar’s look of Alcuin fixed on you these dozen years, if weakness lurks in your blood, it has been deftly concealed.”

“ I thank the King for his kind words, and under the banner of his confidence will start for Britain to-morrow. Has Charles a word of counsel before I begin my journey ? ”

“ None, except this: with your knowledge of war and civil affairs, go to your own people with free hands and with an untrammelled mind.”

“ True, but for what I know about war, and all else, am I not indebted to the Frankish King ? This I would gladly acknowledge by honoring any advice he may give me.”

“ Viewed from this distance, the condition of



British kings reminds me of a yard full of game birds in full line of battle; nothing can be seen but a medley of twirling feathers; more acute wisdom than the juggler being needed to tell whose bird is on top. The only certain way to put a stop to such a war is to kill the most aggressive birds.

“ Were I going to Britain, instead of Egbert, I would make Mercia crow less and scratch more. It can be said with truth that Offa mixed at least a drachm of wisdom with his treachery and arrogance, but Cenwulf, inheriting no such ingredient from his father, deals out stupid vanity in its pure state.

“ I will now commend you to your good friend Alcuin, whose further counsel, I am sure, will prove of great value. To-morrow morning at nine your old legion, with its martial band, will be in front of the palace to conduct you in safety to Antwerp, where a fleet of boats will be in readiness to convey Egbert and his suite to the shores of Britain. Meantime it is Charles’s sincere wish that God may bless your life and your reign.”



### CHAPTER III

**A**FTER leaving the King, whose interview had been so full of pleasant surprises, Egbert spent much of the night in a long chat with Alcuin; for his countryman, of such mature wisdom, had many things to talk over with him, and not a few points of friendly advice to offer. So when he awoke, rather late, the next morning, he found Emmaburg Castle all astir. He paid little attention to this, however, as such things were not new to him in a land where the sudden call to arms occurred almost daily.

After eating a light breakfast, almost alone, he walked to the massing ground in front of the palace, musing on the way how he could possibly show to the King and his friends at the Frankish court his appreciation of their kindness to an exiled prince. He was not a little surprised when told by a page that it was about nine o'clock, the hour set by Charles for his departure. His full legion of several

thousand men, including horse- and foot-soldiers, were there quite ready for the start. His own steed, perfectly groomed, was in the charge of its keeper, decked out with a new saddle and complete trappings, mounted in gold, inlaid with many precious stones; attached to the frontal piece of the bridle was a small golden cross, the glossy coat of the animal being lavishly adorned with rich tapestry, on which were worked the royal emblems of Wessex.

Before he had time to think what other surprise might be in store for him, Charlemagne rode up in his full equipment of battle. Waving his world-renowned sword—*Gaudiosa*—high in the air, which gleamed like silver in the sunlight of the crisp December morning, he gave the brief command, *To the Church.*

Like the shifting of a great mountain of ice, the vast body of steel-clad men, with their sharp-pointed helmets and nasal guard, moved in an instant, horsemen in front, with a precision which would bring the blush to many a modern army.

After a march of about two miles, they made a detour so as to pass in front of the Castle of Frankenberg, better known in Aix-la-Chapelle as the Palace of Sorrow, where, a few years before, Charles's queen, Fastrada, had died, whose loss he for months

mourned alone within its walls, almost to the verge of insanity. Upon its turret had ever since hung, by day as well as by night, the Frankish imperial flag at half mast. The moment the castle door was reached, Charles bowed low with helmet in hand; at this signal every helmet in the legion was removed, and every man bent forward in the posture of homage. The concerted action of this army was so perfect that it had the appearance of one vast piece of metal shifted by the power of some giant hand.

A farther march of fifteen minutes, and Charles, Egbert, and his warriors had reached the building now made famous by the modern money-changer for its many legends and sacred relics.

This cathedral had just been completed by Charlemagne, modelled after the plan of the second Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, and was designed by him as the resting-place for his bones when Providence should call him from the ceaseless activity of his meteoric life.<sup>1</sup> The nave of

<sup>1</sup> It is said that when at the latter part of the twelfth century the tomb of the great King was opened, he was found seated upright upon a throne with a crown upon his head, in the attitude of giving a command. Possibly he had originally been decently buried in a reclining position, but he had become so indignant at the stories told by the money-making showmen about the cathedral, the relics of the place, and their wonderful powers, that he arose in his might to rebuke them.

this unique church was its *chapelle*, from which the town derived the last part of its name.

The eye of every soldier was fixed upon the King, and at the uplifting of his gleaming sword every motion in this vast body of men ceased; it was as motionless as a great lake of dead metal. Charlemagne dismounted and led the way through a double line of priests, at the head of which were four bishops, all singing, as in the solemn hour of battle, the "*Te Deum Laudamus*."

Charles was first to tread the path strewn with flowers, through the open door into the nave of the church, with his glittering *Gaudiosa* uplifted, edge forward, and its hilt level with his chin. Egbert followed next, clad in his military armor in which he had achieved so many victories, with Alcuin and the court officials in the rear.

The double rows of chanting priests closed in and marched behind their King and his guest to the beautiful altar at the end of the *chapelle*. In the centre of the altar stood a palm-tree, entwined with honeysuckle, denoting victory and the bonds of love and friendship. At a signal from the bishops, Egbert knelt at the altar directly in front of a large crucifix made of snow-white marble; upon the head of the figure of Christ was a golden crown, the whole

glittering in the light thrown directly upon it by the sun rays of a prism in the roof of the altar. The contrast between this spot of dazzling brightness and the sombre interior of the chapelle itself was almost startling. As Egbert fell upon his knees, Charlemagne knelt with him at his right, placing his left hand upon the shoulder of his young ward, still holding his sword in his right hand in the position he had carried it down the nave. Now, however, its gleaming brightness was intensified by the light from the prism rays, which fell directly upon its blade.

Egbert, thus prostrated, with his helmet beside him, the four bishops advanced and, assisted by the left hand of the King, placed upon his head a diadem of gold, set with garnet and jasper stones, emblems of wisdom, courage, and power. Upon its front was a golden cross; thrust through its arms was a small silver sword. When this diadem settled upon the brow of Egbert, the bishops and every priest three times repeated "*Dominus Vobiscum*"; the chapelle again echoed with the soul-inspiring hymn, "*Te Deum Laudamus*."

At the word **ARISE!** from the bishops, the young prince stood up, looking pale and bewildered. Charles, who was austerity itself in every-day life,

and terribly fierce in battle, could not repress the tear that stole down his cheek, as with these words he passed to the trembling hand of Egbert the sword, Gaudiosa, his companion in more than a hundred victories.

“ Egbert, take this sword, and may the God of battle bless it in thy hand, as He has ever blessed it in the hand of Charles, by righteous victory. Should the fortunes of war ever frown upon thee, I know that this blade will be surrendered without a stain of dishonor upon it. But whatever reverses may come, never lower the cross [putting his finger upon that in the diadem], which is the symbol of power from Almighty God himself.”

Then the King joined the four bishops and priests in repeating the words, “ *A Deo et Rege*,” an adage now set in sparkling gems upon the sword’s hilt, “*From God and the King*.”

In the reverse order of entering, the priests, preceded by the bishops, led the parties to this brilliant yet solemn scene down the nave of the cathedral, Charlemagne grasping the left arm of Egbert, formed the last of the procession, as they marched to the slow and measured step of the saintly singers. In the seats to the right and to the left of the nave sat crowds of handsomely robed ladies and gentlemen,

invited guests, who scattered wheat over the armored form of Egbert as a token of his bravery, shouting "*Vivat Rex.*"

There is a time in every man's life when surprise and emotion robs him of the power of speech; this hour had arrived in the history of Egbert. As he mounted his horse at the cathedral door to turn his face towards Britain, his tongue was tied; he could not utter a single word to the King, or to his host of friends in the Frankish capital. But as he shook them by the hand, the tears which flowed from his eyes told the King and his people of the feelings in the young prince's heart, with more eloquence than the words which he vainly struggled to call to his aid.

Every voice in the gathering shouted "*Vive! Vale!*" as with Gaudiosa on one side and his own cherished sword on the other, Egbert rode away from Aix-la-Chapelle, waving an adieu to a gathering of kinder hearts than he ever hoped to meet again.

Soon this legion of honor was seen wending its way up the great hill to the north, then thickly covered with trees, over the crooked Roman road, like a zigzag mountain stream, running with molten silver. The strains of martial music floated softly



back, growing less and less distinct as the columns climbed higher and higher up the hillside, becoming silent at last when the descent was begun on the northern slope of the mountain, cutting off both view and sound from the watchers in the valley below.





## CHAPTER IV

SCENES of the future are an infliction from which man has been wisely spared by the hand of a kind Providence.

If Egbert had then possessed the power of the ancient seer, he would have beheld from the hill he was descending, Colonel Churchill, afterwards the first Duke of Marlborough, performing the heroic act of saving the life of Monmouth, in battle at Maastricht, which lay at his feet to the right. When Egbert and his legion reached the foot of the hill, they were compelled to bid adieu to hilly ground, for the distance which separated them from Antwerp ; the whole intervening country being a vast level plain, often flooded by the rivers Demer, Dyle, Schelde, and their tributaries, very much as the Nile floods the Delta in Egypt.

It is the one spot of civilization in the world where you sometimes have to look upwards in-

stead of downwards to see the waters of a river moving sluggishly past you to the sea.

No greater object-lesson of thrift and industry can be found in modern life than the great submerged swamp almost within sight, to the northeast, diked and reclaimed by Dutch energy, converted into the most fertile garden spot to be found in the world. Similar to this was the country in its original state, over which Egbert and his men must march eighty miles before boat could be taken for Britain. That the old Roman roads were still in perfect order was no small advantage, giving to those veteran troops the foothold of unshaken faith.

Besides, the country was no better provided with good roads than with ample and well arranged camps, for the clang of Charlemagne's sword, spear, and battle-axe had scarcely died away in this, as well as in the vaster stretch of territory to the northeast. The other feature which made the march an easy one was that few of the soldiers who formed Egbert's legion were strangers to these roads; they had trodden them over and over again; the whole section was as familiar to all but the very youngest recruits as the training-ground in front of Emma-burg Castle.

So after a march, continued well into the night,

the legion took shelter in a home-like camp near Hasselt. The next day, without fatigue or incident of note, they reached equally good quarters at Malines, where preparations were made to arrive at Antwerp by noon the next day.

It may not be out of place to digress here a little and again draw aside the curtain and throw a speck of light upon the future of the country over which the feet of the coming King of Wessex have just passed. The lowlands between Aix-la-Chapelle and Antwerp have, no doubt, been the scene of as many famous conflicts as any other part of the European continent. There is scarcely an acre where the footprints of the warrior may not be found, from the time of the ancient Roman down to the bloody warriors of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century.

From the first Gallic War of Julius Cæsar to the death of Charlemagne, the Netherlands was the field of ceaseless battles. But even the death of the Great Emperor did not put a stop to the carnage. War on this familiar camping-ground was so incessant that one would almost expect to find the present rank vegetation there, as well as the water which gives it life, tinged with blood. As the part which the England of the future took in these wars may

not be without its interest, I will again revert to the name of Colonel Churchill, whose military experience in this country was unique.

He was first sent by King James the Second to aid Louis the Fourteenth of France to subdue the Dutch. Then on his second visit he went as an actual ally with Holland to fight against the same French king with whom he was an ally in the previous war. It was during Churchill's second campaign that he fought the famous battle of Blenheim, which won for him so much renown and afterwards secured to him the title of the Duke of Marlborough. But the crowning surprise of this last campaign was, that Churchill secretly invited the Dutch prince, William of Orange, to come over and usurp the throne of England, and although King James had been warned of the duplicity of Churchill, he entrusted him with the English troops to oppose the landing of William. Of course King James's trusted general went quietly over to the invaders' camp and welcomed him as the new English King. But of a man of such accommodating loyalty, even William grew suspicious; hence foreign service, mostly in Flanders, with no service to render, was generally assigned to him, while William of Orange was England's ruler.



## CHAPTER V

THE average reader of English history too often places the birth of England's liberties under the shadow of the old yew tree at Runnymede, where King John signed the Magna Charta on the fifteenth day of June, 1215. Yet from closer reading it would seem that to find the original cornerstone of democratic England we must dig much deeper, even to a strata of history from four to six hundred years earlier.

It is known that between the seventh and ninth centuries, during the epoch when the seven kings ruled Britain, the Witan, a council of wise men, wielded a power not less in its greatness than that exercised by any national body of modern times. The Witan was composed of the wisest and most cultured men from all parts of the kingdom, whose characters were above reproach; each district being allowed a certain number to represent it, as regulated by its own body. These men served the

public weal, so far as can be known, without compensation or other consideration than their country's welfare.

The Witan met at stated times to discuss the affairs of the kingdom, endowed with powers possibly greater than those exercised by the Lords and Commons of the present day combined. It made and unmade all laws, civil and criminal; it had the supervision of the Church; declared war and made peace; selected the king and placed the crown upon his head; and if his rule became distasteful to the people, it had equal power to remove him and place upon the throne another, who it was believed would serve the country better.

It was this wise council who had invited Egbert from the court of Charlemagne to become the King of Wessex on the death of Beortric. When Egbert, therefore, had reached the outskirts of Antwerp, he was met by a party of welcome from this Witan, in charge of its chief, Earl Weostan,<sup>1</sup> composed of seven members in full court dress, the archbishop and six priests attached to Winchester Cathedral, as well as the sheriffs, clothed in full military armor,

<sup>1</sup> Earl Weostan, the chief of the Witan, then represented in position and power the *Lord High Steward* of more modern times, the *Interregent*.

from each district of the kingdom, who then, under the Earl, represented the Fyrd, or fighting arm of the nation.

When Egbert saw this delegation coming towards him, led by the archbishop in his full robes, followed by the six priests chanting a hymn of welcome, he dismounted from his horse, fell upon his knee, and bowed as in submission to their will. Each member with the party of welcome followed the example of Egbert, and remained prostrated until he arose and asked them to make known their wishes. Earl Weostan, the chief of the Witan, with the archbishop at his right, advanced towards Egbert, with bowed heads, each holding one end of a large vellum document bearing two white wax seals, one impressed with the insignia of the Witan, and the other with that of the bishopric of Winchester. Fastened to the upturned vellum corners of the Witan seal was a piece of narrow red ribbon, and to that of the bishopric was one of purple. In clearly written old script was the following endorsement in Latin:

*Cruce Mihi Anchora*  
*et*  
*In hoc signo vinces.*



The chief of the Witan then loosed from his own body a golden girdle set with precious stones, attached to which was the sword of Beortric. Drawing it from its sheath, he, in the attitude of submission, placed the cross-shaped hilt in the hand of Egbert, who with great deliberation drove its point into the earth, so that the crown in its bejewelled handle pointed directly upwards.

The Earl and each sheriff then came forward one by one, and thrust the point of their sword into the ground, with the hilt leaning towards, and touching the blade of the royal sword, as a symbol of submission and service. At a signal from the chief of the Witan, each sheriff again advanced, resheathed his sword, then with each of their hands upon it, they drew the king's blade from the earth, strapped it to Egbert's belt, who, with the aid of the sheriffs, remounted his horse, and led the way, followed by the delegates of welcome, chanting their inspiring but solemn music.

After a short ride, the point on the river Schelde for taking boat was reached. It was near the spot where Fort Isabelle is now located in Antwerp, where the river makes a sudden bend to the west, opposite the present citadel of the north.

The three boats in readiness to convey the royal

party to Britain lay in the river of sluggish water, moored to a large float of logs, fastened together by spikes, and hewn off by an axe so as to remove in part the danger of walking upon it.

From the mast-head of each ship floated the royal colors of Wessex. These boats, or galleys, were well and strongly built, and, as they rocked lazily in response to the ebb-tide, looked like three huge oriental sandals. The prow of each was bedecked with the image of some monster, so ugly that a mere glance at them would smite the ordinary heart with an uneasy if not a superstitious fear.

On that of the largest ship, which was lavishly festooned with flags, selected for Egbert and his most distinguished guests, was the giant figure of a dragon, whose revolting head, high in the air with open mouth, formed the prow; its great wings the gunwale and sides; while its terrible tail, after many turns and twists over stern and taffrail, dragged in the water behind. To the upper jaw of this monster was fastened a rope, tightly lashed to the wooden cross-piece of the broad white sail, on which were sewed the royal emblems of Wessex. Upon the side of this ship was its name in large silver letters, driven into the wood like nails; it was christened *Draco*, after the hideous creature in whose coil it was ever clutched.

As Egbert took an affectionate farewell of his old legion, and stepped on board of this strange-looking craft, he turned to the archbishop and said: "I notice that Winchester still keeps close company with the old Greek devil, Draco; we will not call him a god, he is too revolting to deserve such a name. Does the bishop ever expect to win such a monster over to the Church by making him his travelling companion?"

The archbishop, who was not to be outwitted, replied instantly: "Ah! good Egbert, you see if we had left 'Draco' in Winchester, he might have conquered the whole city before we returned, Church and all. But when we have him in such good company we can at least see that he does no harm. Besides, you will notice we have his upper lip tightly fastened open by a rope, so that he cannot close that awful mouth of his. He is as harmless as a chained tiger."

With the haste of an ever-ready soldier, Egbert's horse and limited articles of personal effects had all been placed on one of the boats, so that a few minutes after his arrival the three boats weighed anchor and headed down the river Schelde towards the North Sea. The wind, which up to the time of sailing, had blown softly from the southwest, sud-

denly shifted to the north, and soon began to stir up small whitecaps in the usually calm, sluggish old river, filling the sails and scudding the little fleet rapidly downwards. Dark clouds now gathered in the sky, and hail and rain began to fall at intervals between severe gusts of wind. A couple of hours after leaving Antwerp it grew so cold that the party, especially those from Aix-la-Chapelle, felt that they were running into genuine winter weather, if not a severe storm of cold piercing winds. It was still quite light when the Sloe was reached and the three brave little boats turned their noses into the North Sea at Breskens, where they met an avalanche of whitecaps which threatened to swamp them.

The dragon's wings upon the royal ship seemed to battle with the angry waves with such fury that they looked like creatures endued with real life, while the tail of the monster lashed the waters in the rear as if struggling to be released from their foaming clutch; and Draco himself in front, fierce in visage, leaped higher and higher in the air as the waves rolled in greater billows, as if helplessly choking to death as the pitiless waters were dashed into his open mouth.

In the storm the other two boats became separated from the *Draco*; one was hugging the coast

much against her will, while the other was at least two miles north of the royal ship in the open sea. As the prow of the *Leo*, from which the figure of a great open-mouthed lion was spitting forth salt water in tons, swerved towards the *Draco*, it seemed to be howling mournfully for help. The drenched mane around his neck spoke in silent mockery of the clutches of another main, for which it was no match in such a battle.

The third boat had as its frontal piece the image of a mermaid, which seemed to look over at the other boats with sneering contempt as she was lifted higher and higher upon the great billows. She was in her element of delight, while her awe-stricken companions were bellowing for a foothold upon dry land. No human eye could look upon the strange images upon these three storm-tossed boats, and not picture to himself creatures of actual life struggling in the throes of death.

Until it became intensely dark, Egbert was inclined to jest with his party, and told the archbishop that the storm was the penalty of riding in a boat whose safety was in the keeping of so ill-fated a creature as the dragon. But as the storm increased to a hurricane and the night became very dark, each passenger grew silent and became wrapt in serious thought.

Had an appeal been made to each heart, I do not think one in the whole party would have expressed a hope of escape from shipwreck. Egbert afterwards confessed that the crown of Wessex held no place in his mind during that terrible night. As his heart went up moment by moment in silent prayer, he could not stifle the wish that if again in the King's palace at Aix-la-Chapelle, he would never leave it to possess a crown in Britain at such a cost. At early dawn when the storm had relaxed its anger, the drenched and storm-cowed creatures found that they had left Ostend and Dunkirk far behind them to the east, and were about fifteen miles from Ramsgate on the British coast.

The three boats, although quite a distance apart, soon came together, with the aid of the stalwart oarsmen, and, after exchanging signals, sailed almost due south, and found a pleasant anchorage under the hills of Calais.





## CHAPTER VI

UNLIKE our modern floating palaces, there was no provision upon these small Saxon boats for shelter from such a storm as that which the *Draco*, *Leo*, and *Mermaid* had just passed through, hence every one from Egbert down to the cabin boy was storm-soaked. After bailing out the water, which had found its way into corners rarely reached by ordinary rough weather, the living cargo began to bestir itself in search of comfort.

The clothing that could be spared from the backs of the wearers was hung up like festoons in the rigging of the boats, or wherever the brisk cold wind could best search out the wet spots. Soon after sunrise, one by one the long-closed mouths began slowly to open. It was evident that, aside from the discomfort on board of the ships, the absence of actual alarm, when the storm was at its worst, was not to be found either amongst crew or passengers, not even those on board of the happy *Mermaid*. Every face wore the look of solemn thought.

Under reviving drinks of sack, the use of coffee and tea being then unknown, followed by a breakfast of warm food, the night's dangers began to be discussed, as a case where the Divine hand could be plainly seen in their escape.

By eight o'clock everything was ready for the start from Calais to Southampton. The wind was strong, but not dangerously so. The course was westerly, and, the wind blowing in the direction for a fast run, there was every hope that the one hundred and fifty miles could be covered in about twelve hours. Although some clouds were floating in the sky, the air was fresh and bracing. The party soon recovered from their scare of the previous night, and all began to renew their talks of edifying interest broken off so suddenly when they first met the storm on entering the North Sea.

Egbert had brought with him only two persons from the court of Charlemagne: one was his private secretary, and the other was Sigulphus, a young man who had become a noted scholar under the able teaching of Alcuin. So marked a disciple of the great master had he become, that the teacher often deferred in many profound and knotty questions to his pupil, who, like himself, was British, and had followed his old teacher from York to



Frankland. So deeply was Alcuin impressed with the talents of Sigulphus, that he addressed to him nearly two hundred questions requiring deep thought even to understand, and still greater wisdom to answer them.

These questions Sigulphus replied to in such a masterly manner, that they afterwards formed part of Alcuin's best thoughts in the declining years of his life. This young man was Egbert's choice for founding at his British court a school after the plan of Charlemagne's, but of course on a much smaller scale.

Sigulphus, whose stay could be only temporary, had brought with him not only copies of the questions and answers which Alcuin had addressed to himself, but also those of the principal works of his teacher, as well as transcripts of the famous dialogues between Alcuin, Charlemagne, and others, embracing every known subject discussed at the great King's court: war, civil laws, classic studies, and church matters. Not only were the members of the Witan more than matched in their interview with this brilliant young Englishman with a Latinized name, but even the archbishop and his priests found they had many things to learn from him on Church affairs.

So interesting and animated did the subjects

talked over become on the long and pleasant sail over the English Channel, that latterly Egbert ceased to take an active part, and became instead a fascinated listener. So many new ideas of reform in Britain were mooted by Sigulphus and received with favor by both the Witan and the archbishop, that many plans for the future guidance of the new King may be said to have had their birth on board of the *Draco*, between Calais and Southampton.

Although no one knew Sigulphus better than Egbert himself while at Charles's court, he was more impressed with the depth of his wisdom and power to impart it, after these few hours of close contact with him, than he had ever been before; indeed he did not hesitate to say that, though so young in years, he esteemed him almost the equal of Alcuin himself.

So intensely absorbed was every talker as well as every listener on board the *Draco*, that the time on the trip passed very quickly. It was therefore a moment of regret when this profitable session of questions and answers was brought to an abrupt close by the boatman calling below that Portsmouth light was only a mile or so distant.

The question of forming a priestly band to go with the military camp when open war existed in any part

of the kingdom was fully discussed, and both Witan and the archbishop favored its adoption.

The Britain of eleven centuries ago is of course buried entirely under many strata of changes by the march of progress of modern England. Yet when the famous party on the *Draco* hurried on deck before entering Spit Head, they saw—what the passenger on any craft in the same locality may see to-day—the south and east shores of the Isle of Wight, wrapped in its night-cap of fog.

Man has wrought changes without number as the ages have rolled by, but the mighty hand which holds all the laws of nature within His grip still washes the shores of this little island, as it did eleven centuries ago, with the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, to bless its people with a taste of the balmy air of a half tropical clime.

The cloud of fog as seen from the *Draco* was not one of great warmth; the chilling air of December had met the warm steam as it arose from the water, and pressed it into a low white cloud, like a huge bank of snow.

Leaving Spit Head with sails well filled by a brisk wind, the three boats covered the distance over the bayou to Southampton within an hour. There the party was met by a large and boisterous crowd of

citizens and a number of civic bodies; whence the royal guests were conveyed in carriages to Winchester, led by Egbert in full armor, on his black charger, weak from the ocean trip. There he passed the first night of his return to Britain, within the walls of the old castle, so fruitful in legends and tales of crime.





## CHAPTER VII

**T**HE old city of Winchester, although now wrapped in the quiet air of a dream, full of sacred relics, once marvellous in beauty, now desolate in silence by the vandal hand of Cromwell, has seen many days of chaos and turmoil. But perhaps never in its long history has it looked upon such a day of unrest as that following Egbert's entry to become the King of the West Saxons.

Long before sunrise the morning after his arrival, the streets, as well as all roads leading to town, were packed solid with human beings. Even the serf, who then formed so large a part of the population of Britain, had been given a day off to attend the crowning of his new King.

Tens of thousands of these half-clad men, women, and children, with limbs and bodies exposed to the cold wind, filled every nook and corner within sight of the great cathedral, rudely crowding freeman as well as earl in their effort to get a glimpse of the

man who that day was to be made their royal master. Their faces were flushed with the glow of health and emotion, even if the next day they might be doomed to be taken to Bristol and sold to some cruel foreign master. One of the daily sights in that city, during this dark age, was that of lines of young men, almost nude, models of physical form and perfection of feature, tied together with ropes, awaiting a buyer, by their owner, whose mental gifts dwarfed beside the chattel he was selling. But if the males who were thus sold like cattle were models of manhood, the females, in their scant garments, with beautiful forms and fresh, healthy faces, were greater objects of sympathy, so rudely exposed in this human mart.

The din and bustle around him had awakened Egbert early, very much earlier than his tired body would have chosen. But he had already learned that a king cannot be his own master; the crown, he discovered, became the emblem of greater slavery than the chattel who that day would bow to him in homage as he passed.

When Egbert threw open the shutters of his sleeping-room and glanced out upon the seething throng below, he could not fail to see that his coming had been heralded many days in advance. Every build-

ing was festooned; the royal colors floated in all directions. Arches spanned the streets at short distances over the route he would travel to the cathedral.

Upon one of these tokens of welcome, not far from the castle, his eye fell with a pang of sorrow. His subjects from the fog-clad Isle of Wight had built an arch entirely of oak, entwined with mistletoe, a type of their lingering love for their old Druid gods. Under this arch Egbert could not pass without stifling his own conscience. The Wightans were the last even to listen to the new Christian faith, but, to Egbert's regret, he found they even yet clung to the threads of their old heathen rites.

What should he do? To ride under that arch would make every staunch Christian his bitter foe; if he refused to do so, he would arouse anew the terrible schism of religious rancor. Oh! that he could with a single look banish those hated emblems of oak forever! Just then the last words of Charlemagne flashed into his mind, "*Whatever reverses may come, never lower the cross.*"

He stamped his foot upon the floor and muttered to himself: "The shadow of that arch shall never fall upon me." If Egbert at this moment had the power to divine the future, would he not have cast

his superstition behind him instead of invoking the banishment of those innocent twigs of oak and vine ? If so, he might have seen the little Isle of Wight the great garden for the growth of the *Walls of Oak*, which in the navy of England was to encircle the world and make her both great and glorious. Indeed, the words *Hearts of English Oak* nestle in the bosom of every Briton akin to the word of his God.

There was no time for Egbert to fret over small matters. His valet had not finished his toilet for the day, nor arranged in order for use his gorgeous coronation robes of royal purple lined with ermine, brought from Aix-la-Chapelle, before callers from both the Witan and the archbishop paid their respects to him ; and it was only with indecent haste that he found time for a very light breakfast. His black charger had already been fed and groomed, and stood in the castle yard awaiting his rider.

With the speed of a soldier, he, in full war equipment, was soon in the saddle, hemmed in by many thousand men in armor, each body under the command of its earl and sheriff. At a signal from Egbert the whole pageant formed in order of march. Five hundred soldiers in the front, then Egbert, flanked each side by armored men, with a small bodyguard of militia in the rear of him. Next fol-



lowed the Witan, bishops, priests, and musicians, and all the noted civic bodies in the kingdom in their order.

Before the start was made, however, the Archbishop of Winchester handed to Egbert a small scrap of paper bearing these words: *Beware of the arch of oak!* Upon the back of this Egbert wrote a brief reply, and handed it again to the archbishop. So thickly was every foot of ground packed with human beings of all grades, that the soldiers, almost helpless from lack of discipline, were unable to force the way for the royal guests; when, at the expense of a few lives from trampling and crushing, the pageant at last began to move, the shouts of the people were deafening.

Once under way the marchers forced the crowd to the right and to the left with small regard for either life or limb. The waving of banners and the shaking of hands from the windows of every building were incessant as the royal party marched by. Arch after arch was passed until the ill-starred one made of Druid oak was reached. When Egbert was almost under its shadow, a large horse belonging to some spectator became frightened and dashed just in front of Egbert's steed. The sheriff of one of the advance companies sprang to his relief, grasped Egbert's leaping horse by the bridle, and led him

*around* the object of ill-omen. Meantime the strange animal was quieted, and the rest of the procession passed under the arch, and no further notice was taken of the incident.

Amidst crushing, shouting, and commotion of every kind, the head of the pageant reached the façade of the cathedral, the entrance to which by the mob or any person without the privilege ticket was rigidly guarded by an arm of the Fyrd specially assigned to that duty. Egbert dismounted and passed into the nave, under a long canopy of swords, formed by crossing the points held in position by members of the Witan, the sheriffs, and other military officers. On each side of the walk, up to the façade, as well as in the nave of the church itself, stood hundreds of little girls, dressed in snow-white, strewing flowers at the feet of Egbert.

Next to the famous person of the day followed twelve archbishops and bishops, with Winchester alone in front, carrying aloft a large golden cross. Then came a body of priests and musicians, chanting the *Te Deum Laudamus*. At the heels of the priests walked Sigulphus, carrying in his hand the open book of God, beautifully written on vellum, the cherished memento of both Egbert and himself from the school of Charlemagne.

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When all had passed under the canopy of swords, each pair of sword-holders formed in line and walked by twos up the nave of the church, each holding his sword straight upwards, blade to the front and hilt touching the chin. They encircled the altar, where Egbert was already seated upon the crude stone of coronation, now said to be at Kingston-on-Thames, upon which so many of the kings before him had sat to accept the proffered throne of Wessex. Five men robed in blue silk garments, wearing scarlet sashes about their waists, and purple gloves of silk upon their hands, were unrobing Egbert. Having stripped him bare to the waist, Winchester, wearing his full altar robes, advanced, holding a large golden cruse, filled with oil, in his left hand, then with his right he began to anoint the royal candidate, covering him from the crown of his head down to the waist thick with the holy oil, whispering in a low voice, every time his hand touched the flesh of the anointed, a blessing in Latin, while the priests and musicians continued to chant sacred songs.

At a wave of Winchester's hand, the bishop of Bristol stepped to his side, and each, taking a position back of Egbert, began to rub lustily with both hands every spot which the oil had touched. When

this was completed, both bishops falling upon their knees, with their faces touching the feet of Egbert, offered the prayer of consecration in solemn silence, while the singers chanted the "*Veni, Creator Spiritus.*"

Fresh from his experience on board of the *Draco*, it is a question whether Egbert, at this moment, could have joined with a later poet in singing:

" Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm from an anointed king."

At a signal from Winchester, the five disrobers in blue, who were well-known priests, placed the beautiful coronation garment upon the royal person of Egbert and withdrew. The rich crown of gold, set with many gems, rested upon a small table of snow-white marble, in front of Egbert. Leaning against this table was the large golden cross which Winchester had borne down the nave of the church. At a wave of Winchester's hand, Sigulphus stepped forward and placed in the hands of Egbert the book of sacred memory, opening it at the *Thirty-second* chapter of *Isaiah*, marking the *first* verse with a bold index, from which the bishop of Bristol afterwards preached a short but very impressive sermon.

Winchester now took one side of the crown and

the chief of the Witan the other, and moved slowly towards Egbert, and bowing lowly asked if he would accept the crown of the kingdom of Wessex at the hands of its people, in obedience to their expressed wish. When the answer in the affirmative was given, Winchester pressed the page of the open book to Egbert's lips.

Then followed the formal oath of coronation, that he would pledge to his subjects the enforcement of their popular and legal rights. Also, that in life he would never desert the throne of the Saxons, the Mercians, or Northumbrians, and would maintain, peaceably if *possible*, by force if necessary, the religion of Jesus Christ, represented by the holy cross.

Allowing several minutes of silence for the voice of objectors, the crown was then placed upon the head of Egbert, and the ceremony was at an end. As the hand of Winchester and the Witan touched the crown to remove it from the king's head, the sun shone out in all its brightness, casting upon the altar at the King's feet a perfect figure of Christ upon the cross, reflected in all its colors, from the beautiful glass window in the apsis of the church, followed almost instantly by a black cloud so dense that the whole building was darkened.

The chronicler took note of this as an omen of strange but uncertain significance. Crowned on Christmas Day, December 25th, twenty-five years old, and on the same day that Charlemagne was crowned by Pope Leo Third.

The King was then asked if he had any questions to ask or requests to make. The answer was that while he did not wish to detain them at that time with any questions, he had one request to make, that the sword of his beloved benefactor be blessed for service in Wessex. Thereupon he took Gaudiosa from its sheath and handed it to Winchester, who, standing it erect with point downwards, placed the King's right hand upon the hilt's top, and motioned him to kneel. The archbishop then put his own two fingers upon the cross forming the guard of the handle, while the archbishop of Bristol and the chief of the Witan, each kneeling, took a firm hold of the back of the blade itself. The two bishops then offered the solemn prayer of blessing while the priests and musicians chanted the "*Veni, Creator Spiritus.*"

Before one of the four blessers of the sword had arisen from his knees, or the last rite of administering the sacrament was performed, a great tumult was heard in front of the church. A loud voice,

full of alarm, shouted down the nave: "Athelmund from the north, with ten thousand men, is within a few miles of the church."

The ceremony of the coronation, which was to have had an imposing and solemn ending, was broken up in haste and confusion. Earl Weostan and every military officer surrounding the altar and crowding the aisles rushed from the building, trampling under their feet the weaker spectators, as the terrified mass of human beings struggled towards the front exit. Side and rear doors and windows were all thrown wide open, to give the thousands within the cathedral a chance of escape, but every crushed and frightened creature pressed towards the façade, heedless of the many exits to the right, left, and back of them. When the *melée* was over, it was found that many women and children had been stamped to death, while others had been terribly mangled.

Meantime the archbishop and bishops, assisted by Sigulphus, had hastily replaced the King's robe of coronation with his armor of war, strapped his *Gaudiosa* upon his belt, and finding his horse at the rear end of the church, brought there by a thoughtful sheriff, he mounted it, and, guided by that faithful officer, galloped to the scene of conflict.

There he found Weostan, Earl of Wiltshire, at the head of every available loyal soldier, already engaged in a deadly hand-to-hand fight with the forces of Athelmund. Observing closely the action of the men on both sides, King Egbert could not but draw a striking contrast between the ill-disciplined soldiers of Britain and the matchless columns of warriors he had so long mingled with under the great Charles.

Athelmund's forces fought bravely, but lack of discipline was patent in every one of his ranks. At last he was driven back with great slaughter, losing not only the battle but his own life as well; and the heroic Weostan, though victorious, bought the victory at the cost of his own heart's blood.

Thus before the crown had been warmed by the brow of Egbert, or the sun had set once upon his kingdom, the tie he fain would cement in peace and happiness had been rudely cut by the sword in bloody battle.

Was Egbert, on the day of his coronation, making history for England's great bard of the future to immortalize in words of branded truth:

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."





## CHAPTER VIII

**T**HAT Egbert's reign may begin aright, and a clear knowledge of the Northman, afterwards called the Norman, may be had, a few words in advance of the sequel of the story are deemed desirable.

The name Anglo-Saxon, which, as a race, often stands for progress and civilization, seems to have quite eclipsed the greater name of Norman—the last to conquer and become absolute master over the people of England. Why the English are not called the Anglo-Norman or Normo-Saxon race is a question to which an acceptable answer never appears to have been given.

That the blood of the heathen Angles, mingled with that of the equally heathen Saxons and Jutes, formed a strong and brave race of people, is beyond question. But is it not true that the mental strength and staunch character of the Norman element is equally apparent in the Briton of today ? As will

be shown farther on, long before 1066, when William, Duke of Normandy, fought the famous battle of Hastings and became England's king, thousands of Northmen had a permanent foothold in Britain.

Again, whenever the name Anglo-Saxon is used, to Alfred, without qualification, is given the honor of founding the greatness of the race. When English history is closely read, it would seem that this conclusion has been hastily reached, and savors more or less of injustice.

If a home-made simile or two are not out of place, I will try and make myself better understood by their use.

By invitation a person goes with a friend into his orchard, and is given some luscious fruit; that person naturally gives his host—the owner of the orchard—all the credit for its production. His friend may have done much in pruning, fertilizing, and caring for the trees, without which the orchard would have gone to ruin, and have borne no fruit fit to eat. But if it is desired to give credit to the real author of the quality of the fruit, we must go back to the man who spent the best part of his life in grafting experiments, and who placed the little grafts into the limbs of the old sour stock, possibly years before the present owner was born.

While every true Englishman would blush to rob Alfred of an iota of his greatness, either as a king, an astute statesman, kind husband and father, or as a promoter of everything good which the future of the British Empire developed, yet should not many things, for which Alfred has received the whole credit, in justice be divided between himself and earlier Saxon rulers ?

The written evidence of what is here claimed, it is true, may not exist ; the records may have been lost during the days of pillage and piracy, or some negligent or partisan chronicler may have failed to jot them down.

For many of the great reforms, dating from Alfred's rule, it is thought history can trace even with its dim uncertainty to the reign of Egbert, the grandfather of Alfred. It should at least be admitted that Egbert did not come from the court and school of Charlemagne, recognized by that great King as an able and valiant prince, to slumber in his castle at Winchester nine years, without taking the first step towards righting the wrongs of a people he loved so much.

But this is really what the blank pages of the chronicler would have the reader of modern English history believe. With the evidence which follows,

it would seem more reasonable to suppose that the Saxon chronicler of the first years of the ninth century was asleep during the period named, than that the alert King of the West Saxons, whom the chronicler treats with such silent contempt, was in a trance.

To prove the activity of Egbert's reign, it is only necessary to mention one or two prominent facts, showing the condition of Britain when he was made king and what it was at his death, thirty-six years later. When he crossed the Channel to assume the crown, A.D. 800, the island was in a turmoil, the seven kings were fighting each other like a yard full of angry cats, with Wessex as the underling. At his death, perfect peace reigned from Northumbria to Sussex, and from Norfolk to Wales, with Egbert as the overlord, practically king of all Britain.

The cruel pirates of the North, who for a quarter of a century had made life with the Saxons one of constant dread and suspense, had not set foot on British soil for four years preceding Egbert's death, fearing another crushing defeat, such as he inflicted upon them at Hengston Hill in Cornwall.

If these things were accomplished by a king asleep in his castle, the fruit belies the man who inserted the first graft in the tree. While Alfred stands out

as the grand figure in England's history, as he deserves to do, let due credit not be withheld from Egbert as the little glass negative under the slide of the lantern, casting the much admired picture upon the canvas.

Whatever, therefore, may be written on the rule of Egbert will be upon good authority, or upon what seems fully justified by the fruits of his reign.





## CHAPTER IX

**E**GBERT'S first year in Britain was a busy one. The defeat of Athelmund by Weostan cooled for a time the war feeling of those who were opposed to his accession. But the sudden front of battle upon the day of the new King's coronation was only the first dark shadow cast in his pathway of the many that were to follow. Hence his first act was to call a meeting of the Witan, and consult with them on the needs of the kingdom.

The King first spoke of the lack of discipline amongst the British soldiers, and suggested that a dozen able officers be secured from Frankland to put the militia of Wessex on a good war footing. The fretful quills of the Briton stood up at once, as they have done many times since. The Witan would not confess that their soldiers were inferior to Charlemagne's or to those of any other nation on the Continent. However, after a few soft words from Egbert, they consented that the officers from

the land of the Franks would perhaps be desirable, if for no other reason than to have them confess that the soldier of West Saxony was as good, if not better, than could be found in the ranks of Charlemagne. The Witan found, with the multiplied topics which the fertile mind of Sigulphus had filled their ears, that their session would be a long one. And as many of the questions thus brought before them were brand new, they took note of all that had been said, then asked for a recess of thirty days in which to think them over.

The Briton then, as now, would not do anything hastily. The stay of Sigulphus at Egbert's court being limited to three months, the planting of the school and the maturing of plans for reforms would have to be done somewhat in haste. Before the Witan took its recess, however, a matter came up quite by accident, which supplied food for thought in the future not only for the Witan but also for King Egbert himself. It was true then, as it is now, that kings claimed their thrones by divine right. But with all deference to the march of progress towards liberty, it can be truly said that monarchs then obtained their kingdoms more directly by the voice of the people than they do now in the dawn of the enlightened twentieth century.

The selection, unless by serious breach of rule, was confined to those who had descended from the regal stock. But no matter how far removed in blood from the preceding monarch, it was left to the people, through their Witan, to choose the one who, in their judgment, was the most competent person. Amongst other things, allusion was made by an ill-starred member of the Witan to the choice of Beortric for the throne of Wessex, twelve years previously, instead of Egbert who had an equal claim.

Sigulphus, with a smile, said: "The selection of all kings, whether in Britain or on the Continent, is by divine right, is it not?" addressing his question to Winchester. "Certainly," answered the archbishop, "that is a principle as changeless as the laws of the Medes and Persians." "True," replied Sigulphus, with a broader smile, "but I am sure the fair-minded Briton does not wish to walk in the footsteps of the Medes and Persians by making a bad law as stable as the good one."

The archbishop, who had already been outranked several times by the astute Sigulphus, looked a little confused; he did not want to fall into another trap, so, after much hesitation, he said: "I do not quite grasp the point of my friend Sigulphus."



“ Then allow me to change my remarks to a simple question. If kings inherit their thrones by divine right, there must be a divinity from which that right is inherited. Will good Winchester kindly inform me from what divinity the kings of Britain receive their heritage ? ”

The archbishop took on several colors in as many moments; at last he stammered out: “ Sigulphus, your question is one which, with all my reading and study, has never come to my mind in quite so direct a manner. It is certainly worthy of the most profound thought.” Here Winchester became silent, with no evident intention of saying anything more, believing that his remarks had satisfied his friend.

Sigulphus, still smiling, looked the archbishop squarely in the face as he spoke. “ But good Winchester has not yet answered my question; what divinity does the lineage of the British kings rest its heritage upon ? Will you not please name the god for the benefit of the Witan ? ”

“ In doing so I must speak the plain truth; it is the Saxon heathen god Woden.”<sup>1</sup>

“ Then,” continued Sigulphus, “ you as a Christian bishop, acknowledge, foster, and swear loyalty to a king, whom you have also consecrated with all

<sup>1</sup> Same as Odin, the heathen god of the Northmen.

Christian solemnity, the legacy of a heathen deity, who, without the sanctity with which the heathen god, whom you hate and despise, invests him, could not be your king at all." At this time the whole Christian Witan were objects of study, but if changed to a picture in oil upon canvas, they could not have spoken less than they did.

Egbert, who had often discussed this matter with Sigulphus, rather enjoyed the thrusts between Winchester and his friend; yet, for politic reasons, would no doubt have preferred silence upon a matter of so delicate and personal a nature at this time. Having conquered the archbishop, Sigulphus felt in the humor of throwing a harmless javelin at the King.

"Even your new King Egbert, on the day of his coronation, refused to pass under an arch made of oak branches and mistletoe vines, because they were emblems of the despised heathen deities, yet he reigns as your Christian king by the gift of a god equally heathen as the divinity of oak and mistletoe." All at once the tongues of several members of the Witan were loosened. As Christians they showed the front of anger at the facts which had just been so plainly stated; but the quiet smile of Sigulphus and the calm demeanor of their King quickly removed all such feeling.

“ How do other kings of Europe inherit their divine rights ? ” was asked by a member of the Witan, an earl of no mean merit. Egbert, in his reply, feeling that he was more or less on the defensive and must make an honest statement free from all doubt, said :

“ There is not a monarch in all Europe whose right to his throne is not granted upon the heritage of a heathen deity.

“ Further, there is not to-day a king upon an earthly throne who fills it by the divine right of the true God or His Son Jesus Christ.”

“ There's such divinity doth hedge a king,  
That treason can but peep to what it would.”





## CHAPTER X

THE wisdom of Egbert's inviting officers from the Frankish Empire, to bring the troops of Wessex to greater perfection, was acknowledged by the Witan when the great change in discipline was observed by them.

The King had selected the best officers from his old legion, men whose merits and bravery had been tested time and again upon the fields of battle under Charlemagne.

A household guard of one thousand picked men from the kingdom was placed at the personal service of Egbert, who, for size, physical form, and tactics in the field, were soon made almost equal to the Frankish King's Life Guards, so famous over the Continent as models of soldierly perfection. Every Saturday one half of the able-bodied free men, between the ages of eighteen and forty, throughout Wessex, was called out for drill, being allowed a small sum by the kingdom for the time thus lost

from their usual pursuits. Then on the Saturday following, the other half of the same grade of yeomen took their places, while the first half was relieved.

In this way every man available for military service gave twenty-six days yearly to learning the art of war, taught by officers who were masters of tactics in the use of arms. The jealous feeling which at first existed between the earls of Wessex and the new teachers in the army soon passed away when the earls saw how much they themselves were taught by their Frankish visitors.

Scarcely a year passed before the militia in Egbert's domain could compare favorably with the rank and file of Charlemagne. In the weak hand of Beortric the power of Wessex had so dwindled that his kingdom had become a byword for regal impotence. Even Kent and Sussex, whose relations with Wessex were like members of the same family, turned up a scornful lip when a show of superior authority had been made by Beortric.

The battle between the people of Worcester and Warwick and those of Wiltshire on the day of Egbert's coronation, showed what little welding power there was even between dwellers in adjoining counties, whose origin, language, and interests should have been identical.

The whole island was in a state of unrest. When one of the seven kings could not find cause serious enough for a conflict with his neighbor, the earls in each kingdom would start a quarrel between themselves, which would soon grow to a size large enough to involve two or three kings. With the whole island thus in a foment, and no one hand to guide the ship of this shattered nation through such a storm-tossed period, the task before Egbert can be easily understood. With his well disciplined troops, not once was he worsted in battle by his ever-meddling neighbors.

At last they came to regard him as a power to look upon with envy and hatred, but one to avoid in open conflict. There was no cessation in the drill of his militia, hence the army of Wessex became an object-lesson of peace.

Cenwulf, Offa's successor in Mercia, whose power Egbert dreaded more than all others, proved more of a braggart than a warrior; and it was not until his successor, Beornwulf, became King of Mercia, that the two kingdoms met in real deadly conflict. Time and again they had crossed swords, but, like the scores of clashes with East Anglia, Deira, Bernicia, East Saxony, and others, Wessex easily carried off the victory, while their enemies sued for peace.

At length it began to dawn upon pompous Mercia that her day, too, was near when she must lower her flag to Wessex. This touched the pride of Beornwulf, so, swelling his ranks with every man he could muster in his kingdom, he met Egbert at Wilton, almost within sight of the spire of Winchester Cathedral, where was put to a most severe test the prowess of the two kingdoms in Britain which, twenty-three years before, had been respectively the strongest and the weakest. So bloody and hotly contested was this battle, fought between the rivers Willy and Nadder, that, as the scene of conflict changed from point to point, these streams were alternately red with the blood of the slain and wounded.

Thousands upon either side were left dead upon the field, and so choked were the narrow and obstructed places in these rivers by bodies of the killed, that the stench bred disease for many miles throughout the surrounding country. But the result of this terrible conflict was not in doubt. Mercia was utterly routed, and this, with the surrender of Northumbria four years later, made Egbert master of the whole island, although he did not assume the title of its exclusive king. He allowed Beornwulf to retain his crown, with Wessex as his overlord. Proud Mercia could not brook defeat at

the hands of Wessex, once the most spurned of all the seven kingdoms. The bands of restraint galled him so much that he again threw the gauntlet at Egbert's feet by invading East Anglia, where he met with both defeat and death at the hands of her king.

His successor, Ludica, followed in his reckless footsteps, only to share exactly the same fate. Still undaunted, Wiglaf, who came to Mercia's throne after the death of Ludica, invaded East Anglia with so great an army that Egbert was called upon for assistance.

The King of Wessex joined hands with East Anglia with more of the spirit of bitter anger to destroy his enemy than had ever controlled him before. Mercia's inbred will of revenge on Wilton should be forever crushed.

It is needless to say that Wiglaf's army was slaughtered almost to a man. Never had the arms of Wessex shown their valor or superior discipline as they did in this campaign. It was the deadly assault of one of Charlemagne's old legions over again, in which the Winchester band of chanting priests lent their solemn and impressive aid. The final struggle took place while the Mercians in retreat made their last stand at Watlington near the



river Ouse. By a miracle, Wiglaf escaped with his life, and concealed himself in the moors close to the scene of conflict. Without the capture of its king the conquest of Mercia would not be complete. A large sum of money for the capture of Wiglaf and his delivery into the hands of Egbert alive was offered. For his dead body no reward would be given; he must be taken alive. Every foot of ground for miles in this part of Norfolk, then the home of rushes, swamp-grass, and bottomless mire, was searched without avail. Wiglaf could not be found. Thus a moonless night and a dense fog put a stop to the first day's search. The next and the third day it was continued with redoubled energy, but with no better success.

On the fourth morning after the battle, the natives of East Anglia, with packs of mongrel dogs, many of them a cross between a hound and a water-spaniel, took a hand in the hunt. Old dug-outs for boats were called into service, where the water was deep at the roots of miles of bulrushes and sedge grass, which grew from the marshy bottoms higher than a man's head.

The dogs in advance of one of the searching parties, who had left the marshes for the higher land, surrounded an old deserted hut, with its thatched

sides and roof weather-beaten and decayed. Within it, stretched upon the muddy bottom, was the figure of a human being, to all appearance in the throes of death from fatigue and exhaustion. Scarcely a thread of clothes covered his body; his exposed limbs and trunk were covered with blood, as were also the few pieces of clothing which clung to his body. His face had shared the wounds from thorns, briars, and sharp grasses, equally with his limbs and trunk. He was disfigured beyond recognition; he could not speak. Was it the fugitive King of Mercia ?

Placed upon a litter made of young saplings and some grass to give the lacerated body a degree of comfort, this poor creature was carried to the camp of Egbert, where, after much trouble, in which the services of a Mercian captive were sought, he was pronounced to be King Wiglaf.

The heart of Egbert was touched. He reflected upon the bitterness of his heart when he began the campaign against his defiant enemy. The object of pity before him brought tears of repentance to his eyes. Everything possible was being done to restore the wretched man to life. No one labored for this with more love and tenderness than Egbert himself.

It is true there were symptoms of life, but the terrible gashes over every inch of his body had caused so great a loss of blood, which, coupled with lack of food for four days, in the judgment of the King's doctor, rendered his case a hopeless one. With all the kindness which he could have shown for a brother, Egbert had Wiglaf carried to Winchester, and there, after weeks of nursing, he was restored to partial good health.

To give double evidence of his goodness of heart, Egbert placed Wiglaf again upon his throne, and thereafter he had no friend upon the island more loyal or devoted than this king, whom he had restored to his confidence and his kingdom.





## CHAPTER XI

**T**HERE is little doubt that Sigulphus liked Frankland for its more refined society and higher culture better than he did Britain, the land of his birth.

But, like every man with a good heart and of great mind, he loved his native heath. Hence he spared no pains in laying the foundation for a school at Winchester, which should become one of national renown.

During his first visit he worked day and night that he might leave behind him complete plans for a system of education in all branches, which should become equal in quality, if not in extent, to that in use at the court of Charlemagne.

For years able tutors conducted this school with great success, under the eye of Winchester's able archbishop. It has been truly said that the great occasion never arises without the great man coming to the front at the proper time, just fitted to supply its needs.

Sigulphus' visits to Winchester to watch the growth of the plant he had set out with such tender care were of necessity short. But before the academy had reached its fifteenth birthday there was developed within it a prodigy in the person of a youth, who promised to rival in brilliancy and depth of mental powers the revered founder of the school himself.

The year after Egbert became king, there was born of a godly woman in Winchester a boy who, like Samuel, had, from his birth, been given to the service of God by his sainted mother. When only three years of age, this child, Swithun by name, became a pupil in the royal academy, learning his alphabet within the same walls where men of mature years were students in all the advanced grades of learning.

At the age of ten, young Swithun was master of Latin and Greek, and few questions in philosophy, law, or ethics were asked without receiving from him an answer, not only original in thought, but which carried with it so much profound wisdom as to be accepted and recorded as the standard reply.

At the age of fifteen, this boy passed through an ordeal on the questioner's rack which would have vanquished nine out of ten of the most profound

scholars in Britain or on the Continent. First he was taken in hand by the principal, then by Winchester, and lastly by Sigulphus. Not once did he become disconcerted, and in every case were his answers so wisely given that none of his questioners could improve upon them. He was at once made principal of the academy, in which Egbert's young son, Ethelwulf, was already being taught the rudiments of learning.

The honor thus conferred upon one so youthful was not to be passed by with indifference; hence, in accord with the wishes of the King, who had taken a great interest in the boy's crucial examination, a public festival was arranged. While young Swithun could not feel other than flattered at the attention paid him by his royal master, the effect was the reverse of inflated vanity. That the honored guest of the occasion was in a quandary as to how he should act, surrounded as he would be by such distinguished persons, is natural.

• He always felt uneasy when in company of those superior to himself in rank and station, more especially as such persons were not the companions of his choice. To a mind so astute as Swithun's, however, his course of action was soon decided upon. In the absence of particulars, what follows would

not vary much from the well known record of Swithun's life.

He asked, at the hands of those who had the coming event in charge, the privilege of a large separate table for himself and such guests as he might wish to invite as his personal friends. A request so reasonable was at once granted.

The evening of the banquet arrived; the great school hall was decked with green boughs, vines, and all kinds of beautiful and fragrant flowers; flags and drapery hung from the ceiling and covered the walls. Tables ornamented with flowers and fruits, in which that reserved for Swithun and his friends eclipsed all others, lent a charm to the scene, to which the young scholar was quite unaccustomed.

Guests from the most noble families in the city and surrounding country began to arrive in numbers. Meantime at the table reserved for the guest of the evening there was not a single person, not even Swithun himself.

When the hour was reached for the festivities to begin he entered, followed by forty or fifty of the poorest, most unkempt, and wretched creatures to be found in Winchester or its vicinity. Egbert, who had just arrived, looked upon the guests of this refined young man, first with surprise, then with delight.

The King, not to be outdone in the rôle of charity, arose, and in a few well-timed words commended the goodness of heart of their guest, and welcomed his friends in a spirit which could not be shorn of its sincerity.

All eyes were turned upon Swithun's table, some with a pleasant smile, others with sneers which betrayed the feelings of their heart. The evening was not half spent, however, before the faces which at first wore the impress of contempt, if not disdain, at Swithun's strange freak, were changed to that of unmixed humor. One well-known earl arose and said he could not understand how their honored young friend, with his hours so engrossed with school matters, could find time for so much social visiting.

Another, whose face at first had scowled almost to the point of rage, remarked: "I really did not know that our modest young professor was on speaking terms with the members of so many well-known families"; while a third, interrupting the blushing guest who was now on his feet, in answer to cries of "*Swithun! Swithun! Swithun!*" said: "Judging from the dead silence which reigns at our guest's table, I do not believe Swithun himself knows one of his own friends. I think he has in-



vited these gentlemen here to give the people of Winchester a sample of his maiden joke."

Swithun, who had yet to take his first lesson in wit and humor, turned to those who had just spoken, with a face as solemn as a judge about to pronounce sentence of death upon some poor criminal, said: "I feel now that I owe my friends, especially his Majesty our King, an apology for what I have done. But ——" Here a sign from Egbert brought the Master of Ceremonies to his feet, who, breaking in upon the speaker, assured him that an apology, if any were needed, was due from his hosts to him, not from himself. This called forth a shout of "Yes! Yes!" from every voice in the room. After several short but glowing speeches on the surpassing talents and kind heart of their guest, the gathering dispersed, with three deafening cheers for *Swithun* and his friends.

Although the novel incident which occurred at this festival had caused so much merriment amongst the visitors, it became food for serious thought with King Egbert. Had these qualities of heart shown themselves in a person twice the age of young Swithun it would not have been so much of a surprise, but in a boy of fifteen it seemed abnormal.

The trend of this young man's life appealed at

once to the kind impulses of Egbert's nature. He made no outward show of this, however, but kept his own counsel, intending to keep a close watch over his future life. A trusted agent in the royal household was taken into the King's confidence.

Swithun's movements were carefully watched, especially how and where he passed his nights. The second night after the festival he was tracked on foot—he always scorned to ride—through a pitiless storm of rain, four miles north of Winchester, to a small thatched hut, where there lived the slave of a large land-owner. This poor man, with a wife and three children, had offended his owner in some way, who, to vent his savage fury upon a creature entirely at his mercy, had tied him to a stake and so lacerated his flesh and bruised his limbs as to cripple him for life. Upon a bed of straw this man lay tossing in agony when Swithun entered.

The Good English Samaritan youth heard the man's story of the brutal torture by his master, and carefully noted in his little vellum pocket-book every word he spoke, doubtless for use to reform such outrages at the proper time. Then opening a case which he had brought with him, he began to apply the healing oil to the wounds of his patient; after which he gave him some medicine, left some delica-

cies for his use, offered a short fervent prayer for his recovery, then placing a silver coin in the hand of his wife, left the hut and his blessing behind him.

Scarcely a day passed without some similar act of charity amongst the poor and down-trodden, sweetening the life of young Swithun; all of which were now well known to the King, who, without the giver being discovered, caused to be placed in the hands of this young man a certain sum of money monthly for use in his charities.

Meantime the school, in the able hands of Swithun, made rapid strides. It was by all means the leading one in Britain, York not excepted, and it bid fair to rival even those of Continental fame. Swithun was early in life offered priestly orders, but he declined them, preferring the work of the school and his outside charities to that of perfunctory service in the Church.

That this academy in Winchester was the little germ from which the great University of Oxford afterwards grew, under the tender watering of Alfred, there can be little doubt. Although Swithun has been called simply the chaplain of Egbert, yet he was far more to that monarch. He was in all respects his chancellor and confidential adviser. As a statesman he has been compared with the Saxon

Thomas à Becket, who lived many years after him. Both were chancellors to their king, and both became archbishops.

That he was the equal of Becket as a statesman and scholar there is no doubt. But Swithun loomed as high for his goodness and love for others as Becket sank low for his sins of malice and vindictive hatred of mankind.

In addition to his many other duties, Egbert entrusted to Swithun the erection of numerous public buildings, secular as well as church edifices. He seemed to possess a natural gift for architecture. How much Alfred owes to the instruction and advice of this gifted man, as his tutor, can never be known, because while every act of the great King has been carefully recorded, those of his obscure teacher, who possibly laid the corner-stone of his greatness, were buried with him.

But Swithun raised to himself a more lasting monument than ever marked the life of any king: the universal love of human hearts in return for kind words and kind deeds. Though now known only as the saint of severe rainy weather in July, if we but look back a few centuries, we shall find that his grave and the little chapel which covers it were once the Mecca where so many poor people flocked,

expecting to cure the ailments of their bodies by visiting the resting-place of so good a man.

They had not forgotten the balm which Saint Swithun used with such eminent success: kind words, kind deeds, and a helping hand in time of need.

“ The evil that men do lives after them,  
The good is oft interred with their bones.”





## CHAPTER XII

PAVIA, once famous as the *City of the Hundred Towers*, is an object-lesson showing how soon the greatness of a place departs from it. It is now known only as one of several towns upon which her once hated rival, Milan, casts its shadow.<sup>1</sup>

When Milan was inditing a roll of history, Pavia, too, bristled with great events, of which few other Italian cities—Rome excepted—could boast. At Ticinum, its first name, Augustus met the cortege of Rome's great general, Drusus Germanicus. Here, too, the army afterwards gave to Claudius the Second the title of Emperor.

It was at Pavia that Theodoric the Goth built his royal palace and marshalled his forces to humble the Roman power, a task which the Lombards thought the Goths were too slow in doing, hence they drove them out and made the city their future capital.

<sup>1</sup> In a beautiful chapel at Pavia is a sarcophagus said to contain the ashes of Saint Augustine.

Then followed Charlemagne with his invincible army, utterly wiping out the Lombard dominion under Desiderius for his cruel persecution of the Pope, and annexed it to the great Empire of the West.

Charlemagne found Pavia filled with forts and armed warriors, and a people thirsting for their neighbor's blood. Before he withdrew his victorious legions he planted in this war-stained city a university, the first building within its borders whose motto was peace.

Even to-day hundreds of students learn the secrets of a better life under its ancient roof. Perhaps it was to visit this temple of learning, then quite new, that two priests from Bristol, during Swithun's young manhood, diverged somewhat on their return from Rome to visit Pavia. Whether before or after they had seen other places of interest in the city is not known, but as these two strangers drew near to the renowned temple of *San Michele*, to view its gorgeous interior—notably its basilica,—they were met by a swarm of beggars; a veteran host which still guards the threshold of every Italian church to welcome its visitors.

Many in this army of outcasts, maimed and crippled, were indeed objects whose condition would

touch any heart not made of stone. Some of these vagrants, however, had keen eyes, and saw that these priests were strangers in the land; hence their appeals would brook no repulse. Amongst them were forms wasted almost to a shadow, wrapped in filthy rags, with flesh foul and covered with sores, eyes so bleared as to be offensive to look upon, and features pinched and withered from lack of food.

At this picture the sympathy of the two well-fed Saxons was stirred perhaps as never before. In this group of unfortunates was an old woman, who appealed to their hearts more keenly than the rest on account of her age. She was too old to be persistent in her call for help. She was bent, clothed in vile, dirty rags, her thin white hair was stuck together by dirt and grime, her cheek bones almost cut through the little flesh which remained to cover them.

Her eyes were sunken and dull, but there was evidence in them of early lustre and fire, and at every look they seemed to say, I am an alien in this army of squalor. As she stretched forth her bony hand in silence, the tear which trickled down her face told its own story of sorrow and want. Thrusting aside the others, each priest dropped a silver coin into the hand of this poor woman. Before she could clutch it, it was snatched from her by two younger women,



who rushed away with the two priests in pursuit. So angry were they at this outrage committed by one homeless being upon another, that their shouts "*Thief! Thief!*" were loud enough to gather a crowd to join in the chase.

These women were no strangers to near-by hiding-places, safe against any pursuer but lynx-eyed officers. So it was only by chance that one of them was caught before making her escape. The military guards for preserving order in cities during the days of the Goth and the Lombard, had been replaced by one midway between a soldier and a civilian, not unlike the modern French gendarme. Hearing the loud shouts of the excited priests dashing towards him, with a motley army at their heels, an officer seized one of the fleeing women, and held her until the excited crowd came up.

Her accomplice, seeing that her ally was a prisoner, returned and surrendered herself to the officer. The flushed and perspiring priests called their best Latin to aid them in accusing those women of theft. From whose person? asked the officer, coolly. Before this question was answered, the poor bent victim came up, and shaking her bony fingers in the face of one of the women, her eyes flashing like sparks of fire, cried "Robber!"

The accused women turned to the officer and retorted savagely "Murderer ! Murderer ! We took it from her; it is no robbery." At this the old woman's face put on the glare of a demon, her eyes snapped, she was the picture of one called forth from the grave. "I appeal to my friends here," she said, turning to the priests. The two women sprang at her like wild beasts, and before the officer or others could interfere, had knocked the poor creature down, and were scratching her face like angry tigers.

The three women were taken to the guard-house, where they were at once cited before a judge robed in an army uniform. The officer made a brief statement of reasons for the arrest, and then pointed out the two priests who were there as witnesses to the charge. The judge, turning to one of the clerical strangers, said: "According to the officer's account of this matter, it is not a case of robbery, nor is it one for which the law can punish these two women. Had the money been taken from your hand instead of this woman's, it would have been different. Do you know who she is ?" The priest answered in the negative.

"She is an outlaw from a foreign country—a murderer; therefore no wrong against such a person

is a crime, according to our laws. That your heart was touched by her condition is not a surprise; she is truly in a woful state, for which there seems no remedy this side of death. Even this benefactor seems slow in coming to her relief. Take her away, officer, my eyes loathe at the sight!" With the blood oozing from the scratches upon her face, this object of pity turned towards the judge, and with a voice almost too weak to be heard, but in a dramatic attitude which seemed to mock her bent and shrivelled body, said in Latin that might be called classical: "The remedy is in your hands. Kill me, judge! *Kill me!* Why allow so much misery to blight the earth when a word from you can banish it forever? Condemn me for what I am, *a murderer! I am a murderer!* Why then should I be tortured any longer in life for my terrible crime?" The poor creature swooned and fell upon the floor as if stricken with death.

At this sight and the pathetic words which the woman had spoken, the two priests were completely unnerved. Turning to the judge, one asked: "Who is this woman? She is certainly not a person of mean birth."

"She is not," he answered. "Are you not Saxon priests?"

“ Yes.”

“ And do you not detect the Saxon tongue in this woman ? Her name is Edburga, the wife of your late King Beortric, whom she poisoned, and for which crime she became the fugitive outcast as you now see her.” The dingy court-room, which hung with armor, shields, swords, battle-axes, and every emblem of cruel war was in a moment transformed into a place filled with the air of holy solemnity.

The almsgiving strangers had become divine servants. While one gently raised and held the form of the dying woman in his arms, the other placed before her closed eyes the crucifix, and, drawing forth his bottle of holy oil, performed the sacred rite of extreme unction. At the same time his brother lifted his eyes devoutly to God in prayer to receive her soul. Even the judge looked on in silence, as if awed by the changed atmosphere around him. The woman opened her eyes and gasped, but the power of speech had left her.

In her last hours she was tenderly cared for by her benefactors, and the death she so much coveted claimed her before they left Pavia ; they made ample provision for her decent burial.

Thus passed away the beautiful but wicked daugh-

ter of Offa, the honored King of Mercia, whose crime placed Egbert on the throne of Wessex, and degraded future wives of Saxon kings by robbing them of their right to joint coronation.





### CHAPTER XIII

THE reign of Egbert covered one of the most critical periods in the history of the Christian faith. In Palestine, where it had its birth, as well as in the adjacent lands of the East, the Koran of Mohammed had become the universal belief, and Christianity had not only been stamped out, but its very name was despised. Between the Saracen of the East and the Scandian of the North, it is a question in which heart at this time reigned the most bitter feeling against the name of Christ.

Before the smallest seed sown in the land of the Northman in the name of the humble Galilean had time to sprout, it was torn up and cast upon the fanatic fire of Odin, their heathen god. The territory in Europe, therefore, which held to the true faith was wedged between these two ponderous millstones, and its very existence, from the human standpoint, then wavered in the balance.

The Saracen had long waged a determined war-

fare against the Christian before the Northman met and joined hands with him in equal hatred. It was about the same year that Egbert took shelter under Charlemagne's roof that the Northman<sup>1</sup> made his first piratical visit to Britain, but not until several years after he became King of Wessex did these visits threaten to inflict a serious scourge upon the island.

Year by year these marauders became bolder, more desperate, and bloodthirsty, until the people of the whole island lived in a state of constant terror. At first Egbert did not give these unwelcome calls of the Scandian much thought, devoting his whole time to improving his system of schools and in laying plans for centring the government of the entire country in the hands of one king. This, as carried into effect under his grandson, Alfred, was really accomplished with very little bloodshed.

That Egbert did not assume the title of King of England, as his works of reform seem fully to have justified him in doing, was doubtless due to the later years of his reign being devoted to combating the incursions of the Northmen, who had become a

<sup>1</sup> The name Northman or Scandian will always mean either Norwegian or Dane. In the ninth century the line was loosely drawn between the two.

far more formidable enemy than any residents of the island.

At each visit they came in greater numbers, and struck such fear into the hearts of the people by their merciless acts of pillage, slaughter, and fire, that no other thought had a place in the minds of the terrified islanders than how to defend their homes and lives against these sea-devils of the North.

Their visits became like swarms of hornets. While a fleet of viking boats would suddenly appear at one port and make a murderous assault on the people of that place, carrying away every article of value, and cruelly killing every man, woman, and child who came in their way, leaving their homes in ashes, another fleet would descend upon a different place, perhaps a hundred miles distant, at the same time. It was not an unusual thing to have five or six points attacked on the same day, doubtless by an understanding between each viking in charge of the fleets of these sea-rovers. While a body of soldiers would be hurried to one place to protect the people from outrages, word would come of their appearance in several others, baffling entirely any steps taken for safe defence.

To remove this terrible visitation, Egbert dropped everything else in hand, and arranged by concerted



action on the part of the other kingdoms to fully protect the people, and mete out to their cruel tormentors punishment severe enough to make their visits a dangerous venture. After a few crushing defeats, these desperate pirates looked at the island with considerable dread, and would pass it by and visit the Frankish kingdom on the other side of the Channel instead, where they robbed and murdered with more impunity since the death of Charlemagne.

Britain contained so much wealth they coveted, however, that wily calls were at times made, but with much more caution than usual. A few years before Egbert's death they grew bolder, coming with larger and better equipped fleets, and with bodies of armed men large enough and brave enough to cope even with the troops of the island.

Their last visit in Egbert's time was in 832, when they arrived with a very large fleet, and took possession of the Isle of Sheppy. Their preparations were formidable, and meant either their success or a bloody and desperate fight. A few hours after they were seen comfortably settled on the Isle of Sheppy, in the east near London, they made their appearance at Plymouth, almost the extreme western harbor of the island. This swift flight surprised the Saxons, but it should not have done so,

for these Scandians were not only the best sailors in the world but the most daring.

The ocean was their element, their natural home. With their well-built, well-rigged and admirably manned galley-boats, they could fly over the water like eagles. They sailed from Plymouth harbor up the zigzag river Tamar, which divides Devon from Cornwall, and reached a point opposite Tavistock, where, to their surprise, they met the Saxon army under Egbert. The Scandians sought advantage by retreating to Hengston Hill, a short distance west of the river, in Cornwall. Egbert with his brave troops climbed after them with equal agility. So certain was he of victory, that he left a body of troops behind him to guard the river and boats so that the enemy could not escape.

The Saxons began the battle, as the Scandians thought, at a great disadvantage, for, climbing like foxes, they had posted themselves at the top of a high cliff, guarding every approach to it with such care as to make their position almost impregnable.

Upwards climbed the Saxons like a bank of steel, bravely facing their savage foe, who looked down upon them as with scorn for their madness. Like a gleaming shower of metal came the spears and battle-axes of the Scandians upon the heads of their

enemy, a hundred feet below them, hurled with such precision that the heads of the Saxon warriors were cleft in two, through their shields and thick helmets, till the dead lay in heaps.

The savage battle-cry of the Northmen filled the air, followed by their shouts of "*Valhalla! Valhalla! Valhalla!*" But they had undervalued their foe, who were trained for victory not for defeat. The Scandians who were defending the approaches to the cliff on the slopes of the great hillsides behind it were the picked men of this army of desperate warriors, who considered the forcing of a passage through their ranks an impossible thing. But the main body of the Saxons had already encircled the whole mountain, while the troops who had faced the terrible avalanche of murderous weapons at the foot of the cliff had withdrawn as if in flight. It was a decoy. While the Scandians were shouting victory from the cliff, their supposed invincible guardians on the hillsides behind them were being forced back inch by inch, yard by yard, upon those posted on the cliff. Knowing the desperate position they were in, the brave guardians of the passes made a fruitless effort to break through the Saxon ranks and escape. At every attempt they were cut down like grass by the enemy's blood-

stained axes and swords, which rose and fell in the awful carnage as if wielded by some deadly machine without life or mercy.

Farther and farther the Northmen fell back; at every step they were nearer the cliff of death.

Above the solemn chanting of the priests could be heard the voice of Egbert, with his gleaming Gaudiosa high in the air, "*No quarter to the outlaw! No quarter to the outlaw!*"

At last the Scandians were forced to the edge of the precipice, falling a hundred feet to certain death. Faster and faster they were thrust over, until few remained to fall beneath the deadly Saxon weapons. As they made the awful leap downwards, they shouted "*Valhalla! Valhalla!*" So terrible was the slaughter that the whole cliff-side became rivulets of blood. Below, the bodies of the slain were piled in great heaps, so drenched with gore that they could not be recognized.

If in the body of one in the heap below was found life, he was at once killed. The order of Egbert, *No quarter to the outlaw!* was obeyed, it would seem, to the verge of heartless vengeance. It was the cry, *No mercy to the merciless!* The hillsides were covered with the slain, there were no wounded, for the wounded were at once killed.

A few Scandians had broken through the ranks and made their way to their boats, only to meet certain death at the hands of the Saxon soldiers stationed there. Unless a straggler had hidden in the caves or thickets, not a Northman escaped with his life. The great fleet of boats fell into the hands of the Saxons, with all their contents.

The capture was one of great value, as this same band of pirates had just visited Frankland, where they had pillaged every town on the river Seine as far south as Rouen. At the latter city their plunder in money and church and monastic properties represented great wealth.

Thus ended the battle of Hengston Hill, giving the isle of Britain perfect rest from Scandian visits for four years, until after the death of Egbert.





## CHAPTER XIV

**H**AD Alfred been the direct successor of Egbert, instead of three or four men of straw preceding him on the throne, there seems little doubt that the island would have been spared the terrible baptism of blood and fire from the Scandian, which scourged it for more than seventy years after Egbert's death.

That Alfred was as able a man as his grandfather, if not even abler, must go unquestioned. But before he became king, those who had gone before him had allowed all the reforms which Egbert had begun to moulder from dry-rot; while the armed force which Egbert left in a state of discipline, inferior to no Continental army, had reached the grade of a motley mob.

Under the able teaching of the wise and good Swithun, the questions of education and reforms in government and law were revived by Alfred, as they could only have been revived by a master mind.

But this work had occupied Alfred's entire attention to the neglect of the army; for Swithun was the last man from whom to seek counsel on questions of war. War against sin, and the work of uplifting the man who was crushed under the heel of oppression was the field in which Swithun fought, as few men have done since his time. But to confer with him about a campaign of blood in the slaughter of his fellow-man would turn his kind gentle heart inside out and crush it.

It is therefore easy to see that Swithun's whole influence over Alfred, and there is no doubt that it was great indeed, was wielded in the direction that the good man's mind and heart prompted him. When, therefore, the Scandian fell upon the island with more fierceness than he had ever done before, Alfred was quite unprepared to cope with him. It is well known that for months he deserted his throne and hid in forest thickets, subsisting as an outlaw in disguise, to escape the fury of this terrible visitor. But that such an alternative would have occurred with an Egbert in Alfred's place is open to serious doubt.

It would seem, however, that not even a wrong which bears upon its surface evidence of the grossest outrage, for which no excuse is in sight, has some

ground to justify it when the hidden facts are brought to light. Perhaps then some reason may be found to excuse the Scandian in part for his heartless cruelties inflicted upon the people of Britain.

There is every evidence to show that no people on the face of the earth were as blindly devoted to the religion of their heathen gods as the Scandians. They held it not only as a duty but as a privilege to die in defence of their weird beliefs. To inherit heaven, their god Odin made it imperative that at death the body should be burned, and with it everything the person possessed in life. The more property so burnt with the dead body, the greater the happiness would the owner fall heir to in the world of the future.

To their religion and their gods this people clung with a fanaticism scarcely equalled amongst the weird devotees of the East. As already stated, it was not until a dozen years before the close of the eighth century that the Scandians molested Britain, although it had been under the influence of the Christian religion centuries earlier.

It was about the time of their first visit that Charlemagne had begun his relentless wars against the Continental Saxons and lands farther north. Perhaps he had invaded the very territory from which



the pirates who were pillaging Britain hailed. The nature of Charlemagne's warfare is too well known to need recounting here. He carried the Gospel of Christ in one hand and his *Gaudiosa* in the other, followed by a command to accept and believe the one or die by the other—no compromise.

These people of the North who were so wedded to their heathen gods resented Charlemagne's alternative to the death, and told him it was a depth of slavery to which they would never submit. In the construction of boats, general commerce, and civil laws the Scandian was in advance of his island neighbor. To one law not rigidly enforced in Britain the Northman then adhered with unswerving fidelity. It was that of birthright. The eldest son fell heir to every part of the real property left by the father, sometimes leaving the sons and daughters, even of a wealthy parent, almost penniless.

This law applied equally to the governing households—kings and earls—as to the ordinary citizen. The sons thus left without any inheritance were not only expected by their parents at their death to become *sea rovers*, but were commanded to do so. They were told to acquire wealth by visiting and robbing Christian countries, which in the heathen code of morals was regarded as legitimate.

According to the teachings of their gods, they were honoring them by pillaging the churches and monasteries of other countries, and laying the buildings in ruin, in which great wealth had accumulated from year to year.

It is easy to understand why the piling up of treasure in religious buildings was a sin so offensive in the eyes of the Scandian when the corner-stone of his religious belief was that all possessions should be burned with the dead body of their owner at his death, to insure him an entrance into the blissful home of the future.

Not only then can we trace the shadow of a reason for the Scandian nursing such a terrible hatred for every people who raised the cross as the standard of their religious belief in the bloody wars of Charlemagne in the north, but we can see dimly why Britain should be severely punished because Egbert was the pupil of Charlemagne in his severe Christianity.

Therefore, although upon the surface the object of these bloody descents upon the island was for pillage and rapine only, there seems good ground for charging religious vengeance with many of the inhuman cruelties inflicted.

As the history of Britain is made up in a great

measure of these Scandian ravages, from the death of Egbert to the close of the ninth century, with an assumed religious war as the motive, a brief outline of the Northman's strange faith and his curious deities is not deemed out of place here to insure a better understanding of what is to follow.

The hallowing of myths seems natural to the human heart. Since the time of Adam's fall, man in all parts of the world has never failed to rear his idol of worship. Left to himself, without a revealed religion, it is always the idol of falsehood.

The dried seaweed hung in the open air tells of approaching rain by its dampness, because it is its nature to attract moisture. So is man charmed and fascinated by the glamor and tinsel of error rather than by the naked word of truth, because sin is natural to his heart, while truth is not. The earth nurses superstition to bury truth out of sight even faster than it grows rank and noxious weeds to choke the growth of the corn which feeds man and sustains his life.

It is a strange fact that the West, which embraces all the Teutonic race, has never produced a mythology. Its soil and air seem fatal to its growth; while this mystic plant germinates in all its witchery in the soft and sunny atmosphere of the East,

notably in Persia and Arabia, which, respectively, produced the creeds of Zoroaster and Mahomet.

Greece clothed her myths in highly romantic pictures of thought, and tinted them with colors not only gorgeous enough to fascinate the mind but to enslave it. Even the critical student of the twentieth century reads the fables, legends, and myths of ancient Greece with a zest that cannot be aroused by the pages of any modern book which he knows contains much truth.

Is it surprising then that a people scarcely half civilized, as was the condition of the Scandian in the ninth century, should have become slavish devotees to a religion clothed in all the romance and mysticism of oriental fancy. Yet what charmed the untutored Northman in the early part of the Christian era had before that time made sceptics of the learned Greeks, who had originated gods for the Scandian to worship. That the heathenism which chained the human family from the Adriatic Sea to the islands around North Cape in the Arctic Ocean, in the name of the god Odin,<sup>1</sup> was of Eastern origin does not seem to admit of a doubt. To give even an outline, however, of the system of this interest-

<sup>1</sup> In Denmark and north of it, it is spelled *Odin* ; south of Denmark it is spelled *Woden* ; it is, however, identically the same deity.

ing mythology of the North, filled with such incredible stories, would require too much space, so our remarks will be confined almost wholly to what pertains to warfare.

Whether by coincidence or otherwise, the original deities of the Scandian are three in number: Odin, Vile, and Ve; hence a trinity. Their mystic account of the creation of the earth is that an immense chaos of ice floated in an endless ocean before such a thing as land was known. It was located in the cold, dreary North, where a monster dragon, called Nidhogg, had his abode; whose hideous shadow covered the sky when his great eyes of fire and flaming breath were reflected upon the ice. A long distance from this gigantic ice-floe there was in the South a place named Muspelheim, a world of fire and flame, where all was brightness and heat. It was guarded by *Surt*, with a flaming sword, and was the dwelling-place of an immense host of fiends, who would appear at Ragnarok, the destruction of the world, led by Fenris-Wolf, Midgard-Serpent, and Hel, the god of death, and burn it up with fire.

Between these two worlds, the one intensely cold and the other very hot, was a great yawning abyss called Ginnunga, where the darkness and stillness

was oppressive beyond conception. In this abyss gathered vast bodies of fog and moisture, which, in time, were formed into the figure of a huge giant named Ymer, whose size could not be measured on account of his immensity. The three gods—Odin, Vile, and Ve—slew this giant, and from his body formed the earth. His flesh was made into land, his blood into water, his bones formed the rock, his skull became the vault of the heavens, and his brains the clouds.

The legend of the creation of the human family by the same three gods is equally unique with that of the creation of the world. Odin, Vile, and Ve, walking by the side of a lake of clear still water, sat down under the shade of an ash tree, and, after watching the reflection of its beautiful branches upon the face of the lake for some time, saw in it the shadow of man. They at once took the limbs and boughs of the tree, and from them formed man after the shadow they had seen; Odin giving him life and spirit, Vile reason and power of motion, while Ve gave him blood, hearing, vision, and a fair complexion.

A little farther on they came to an elm tree, and went through exactly the same experience in the creation of woman.

Hence the ash and the elm were venerated as sacred trees by the Northmen.

The first advent of the god Odin amongst the Teutonic family, probably more than a century before Christ, is a romantic story, and savors much of the black art practised with such skill and mystery by the magician of the far East. Whether he was a great warrior as well as a wizard is not known definitely. Many of the tricks with which he is credited point to Persian origin; such as striking men dumb or blind by a look; making his friends invincible through his magic touch; changing himself into a bird, beast, fish, or serpent, and flying to whatever place he willed, while his body remained in a trance; extinguishing fire by the waft of his breath; raising the dead by a touch of the hand; and making a head, severed from its body, whether friend or foe, speak and tell him all he wished.

His influence over men seems to have been marvellous, due in a great measure to his ability to change his features in an instant from the most comely face and winning smile to a look dreadful to behold. His horrible visage was turned only upon those he disliked.

Odin with twelve pontiffs appeared suddenly on the shore of the raging ocean, with no craft what-

ever in sight by which they could have travelled over the water. Upon his back he carried a small package. After exchanging a few words with his discoverers, he unfolded the package and converted it into a boat, in which the thirteen took passage and sailed away. Before doing so, however, he spread his hands towards the boisterous waves and commanded them to subside, and in an instant the sea became calm. The wind, which was blowing from the wrong point to carry the boat in the direction they wished to travel, was in a moment shifted, in obedience to a word and gesture from Odin.

The amazed beholders kept their eyes upon this wonderful craft as it started into the open ocean, only to become spellbound when it suddenly disappeared beneath the waters and was never again seen to come to the surface. This wonderful ship received the name of *Skidbladner*, or the Ship of the Gods, and became famous amongst the worshippers of Odin.

By the goddesses Frigg and Jord, Odin had several sons, the most noted amongst whom were Thor, Heimdal, Balder, Hoder, and Vidar. Thor was the god who ordered war and declared peace, rode through the air in a flaming chariot, with a hammer so mighty that with it he could crush



a mountain, and even shake the earth with a blow. He controlled the thunder and lightning and the mighty winds. He was also the giver of bounteous harvest, or could command a famine; hence he was appealed to as holding in his hands the welfare of the people.

At the top of the arch of gorgeous colors, formed by the aurora borealis, the Scandian placed his third heaven, and in the legion of ever shifting rays and tints he pictured the figures of his gods, wearing crowns of unrivalled beauty, reigning in a world of cloudless skies, surrounded by evergreen fields, silvery brooks, trees, flowers, and birds. High in the heavens where this sight ends, is located the bridge Bifrost, at the entrance to which stands Heimdal, to guard it against the passage of giants, who, known as Jotuns, and whose abode is Utgard, always represent evil spirits, the enemies to everything good.

On the day of Ragnarok, the destruction of the world, Heimdal will blow the horn of warning, as the watchman of heaven.

Balder was an incarnate deity, representing the giver out of everything that was good: life, sunlight, and summer. He was accidentally slain by his blind brother Hoder, whose hand was directed in

the deed by the giant Loke, the great spirit of evil and darkness, thus consigning his brother to Hel and precipitating the ruin of the gods.

At the final destruction of the earth, the three demoniac sons of the archdemon Loke, Fenris-Wolf, Midgard-Serpent—a monster whose body encircles the whole earth beneath the great ocean,—and Hel, will head the legion of evil; but Fenris-Wolf will be slain by Vidar, and for his victory over that great enemy of mankind he will be made joint ruler in heaven with Vale, who, it is said, when only a babe twenty-four hours old, slew his brother Hoder for the killing of Balder.

After Loke had scattered the seeds of evil everywhere, legend describes him as fleeing to a great mountain to avoid the vengeance of the gods, at whose approach to his hiding-place he would leap into a lake and become a fish, but Odin discovered him beneath the waters of the lake and captured him with his net. He was disemboweled and bound to a rock by his own intestines. A venomous serpent was suspended above him, so that the deadly poison which dripped from his tongue would fall into the giant's face. The wife of Loke so placed a cup that the venom would fall into it instead of the face of her husband. But a chance drop fell upon his lips,

producing such agony that writhing from pain he shook the whole earth; hence the Northman's theory of earthquake is that it is the quiver of Loke's mighty body in the throes of torment.

Although the ashes of Odin's body are supposed to have a resting-place in the magnificent temple of gold erected to his memory at Upsala in Sweden, his spirit is made to reign as a god, jointly with Frey, the goddess of love, in the Scandian heaven of Valhalla.

In this beautiful gilded palace, Odin is supposed to rule in all majesty and to be clothed with supreme power. Valhalla is the gorgeous dwelling-place for every believer who falls in battle. Here Odin sits upon his dazzling throne, surrounded by a great host of Valkyries, the servants of his will. At his right is a cage of gold, inlaid with precious stones, the home of his two enchanted ravens. These two messengers are sent by him daily to all parts of the world to bring him tidings of everything that is occurring, a mission they perform with absolute fidelity. Not a man who owes allegiance to Odin can be injured in battle without his knowledge, and, if killed, his soul is at once conducted by a Valkyr to Valhalla, there to be rewarded with eternal bliss for his valor, and to feast at the superb banquet-table with Odin forever.

The Valkyr is one of the most picturesque creations of Scandian mythology. She is a beautiful maiden, wearing an armor covered with blood, always enveloped in a blaze of brilliant light. A beautiful halo crowns her head, from which fall long tresses of golden hair, and in her hand she carries a glittering spear. Thus equipped, she rides, as a messenger of mercy, through the air on Odin's sacred horse. No battle in which the subjects of Odin are engaged ever takes place without the presence of the Valkyr.

It is not only the duty of this creature of the heavenly court to carry the soul of the slain to Valhalla as soon as the breath has left this body, but, under the directions of Odin, it is the sacred duty of the Valkyr to single out in the heat of conflict which man shall fall in battle and which shall not. Thus, in the belief of the Scandian warrior, the preservation of his life is never in his own hands, but is controlled by Odin, through the Valkyr, his messenger.

The foregoing are only a few of the weird powers who swayed the minds of the superstitious Scandians, whom the people of Britain had to encounter upon their own soil as marauders during the whole of the ninth century. But going back about two hundred years to the reign of Saxon Edwin, we

find that these strange religious beliefs were as firmly rooted in the hearts of the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons, who conquered and then ruled Britain, as they were in the hearts of the heathen hordes from the North, whom their descendants, now Christians, were compelled to face in savage warfare.





## CHAPTER XV

SEVERAL years after the death of Egbert there came to reside at the court of Ethelwulf a child, niece of the late king, named Egberta.

This girl was not only beautiful in form and face, but her sweetness of temper and brightness of mind soon made her a great favorite in Winchester. Swithun the Good found in this child, whom he always called the Princess, a creature after his own heart. Swithun's love for little Egberta was in a short time, however, almost eclipsed by the child's love for her tutor and spiritual guide. They became inseparable friends. On all visits of charity made by Swithun, whenever circumstances would permit, the Princess became his companion. So often was Swithun the Good seen making his late evening calls on the poor and destitute with Egberta's hand linked in his own, that far and wide their names were coupled together as the Saxon Samaritan and the little Sister of Mercy.

When the Princess heard one of the teachers in the school read for the first time Christ's parable of the man who fell among thieves on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, so cruelly deserted by the priests and so tenderly cared for by the man of Samaria, she said: "That kind man was just like good Swithun, was n't he?"

Scarcely was the strong arm of Egbert, which had wielded the sword with such deadly effect against the Northmen, stilled by death than the visits of that dreaded foe again became unpleasantly frequent and terribly bloody. One evening when Swithun was able to spare half an hour from his ever active life, an exceptional thing indeed for him, he sat down by Egberta's side and related to her many tales of murder and robbery by the Scandians, and the dreadful tortures inflicted by them upon the people of Britain. When he had finished his story, the Princess, with an amazed and innocent look into the face of her friend, said: "Then those cruel people have never heard of Christ, have they?" "On the contrary, my child, it is because they have been told all about Him that they hate us so bitterly. They worship and believe in another god called Odin, a heathen. So deluded are these people by their false god that they even court death

in defence of his name. How they can believe in Odin and reject our Christ is as great a mystery to me as it is to you, Egberta."

Not very long after this conversation between Swithun and the Princess, a courier arrived at Winchester in great haste from Southampton, with the news that the Northmen were burning that town and killing its inhabitants. A force of militia was at once called out, and started with all speed to engage the enemy. Before they reached there, however, the Scandians had laid many buildings in ashes, slaughtered a number of the people, and their little midget fleet, with its daring viking, was already several miles in the open ocean, with everything valuable in their boats that Southampton had contained, heading for the mouth of the Loire, on the Frankish coast.

It was learned that this pirate crew was quite small, but what they lacked in number they made up in brutal savagery. The descent was so sudden that there was no time for giving an alarm or preparing for successful defence. Men, women, and children fled from the burning town and their fierce butchers like hunted hares, and concealed themselves in forest thickets or wherever they could find a place of safety in the surrounding country.



The Northmen, not satisfied with having stripped the place of everything valuable and laying it almost in ashes, pursued the terror-stricken people to their hiding-places, and killed and maimed a large number. To a thick-wooded hill, a few miles from the town, many of the affrighted inhabitants ran for safety. Thither the bloodthirsty viking and his army of axemen and swordsmen pursued them, and quickly despatched and wounded them right and left; nailing others alive upon trees, with their poor bleeding limbs stretched in the shape of a cross, to express their contempt for the emblem of the Saxon's faith.

This was the scene which met the eye of the Saxon army when it arrived. For years afterwards this hill was known as the Mount of the Cross. Less than two centuries later, the Norman conqueror of England kneeled with reverence upon this same hill, as if to atone for the sins of his viking fathers, for staining it with blood in mockery of Christ; and built thereon that beautiful monument to Christian faith and service, Netley Abbey, an ideal model of Cistercian design that nothing in previous ages had equalled, and which succeeding ones have sadly failed to rival in beauty.

Although in duration this piratic visit must be

measured by minutes rather than hours, yet in its wake it had left many victims, who required the care of the gentle nurse for dressing their wounds, and the generous hand of charity to feed the hungry, a service in which Swithun's heart was at once warmly enlisted. Those who had been nailed to the trees were quickly lowered by the Saxon soldiers in time to save most of their lives. The dead were decently buried, and military tents erected upon the hill in which to nurse the wounded and shelter the homeless. In this mission of mercy little Egberta pleaded with those at the palace, under whose direct care she was, to be allowed to go with Swithun and his assistants to aid in caring for the patients in the tents. On account of her extreme youth permission was at first refused, but her earnest entreaties at last prevailed, and she was reluctantly allowed to go.

She mounted her little pony, and in company with her chaperon rode beside Swithun and his aids, over the solid Roman road to the scene of carnage. The soldiers who had arrived several hours earlier had done much to relieve for the time the sufferings of the victims. The sight was one to make any heart bleed.

Although many buildings in the town had been

burned, the pirates had left quite a number intact in their haste to get safely away with their plunder. Under the master hand of Swithun to bring order out of chaos, a large number of people were enabled before sunrise the next morning to be comfortably housed and provided for in the town. They did not return, however, without being haunted by fears of a second visit from their persecutors, in spite of the presence of a large body of troops to protect them.

The scenes at the Mount of the Cross were truly heartrending. The limbs of those spiked to the trees had been most cruelly lacerated, while the gaping sword and axe wounds of those still alive, with their bodies covered with blood, presented a most ghastly sight.

When Swithun first beheld this field of slaughter another side of the goodness of his heart was touched. He thought the presence of the Princess would be unwise, regarding the whole scene as too revolting with which to tax a nature so sensitive and pure; hence he whispered to the chaperon and asked her if it would not be better to have the child taken back to Winchester.

When this suggestion was made known to Egberta she did not answer in words, nor make known her disappointed feelings by a cross, angry look. Know-

ing that what Swithun would say and do could only be prompted by love for her welfare, she turned upon him her large blue eyes, filled with tears, that made an appeal which no words could so well express.

Swithun quickly read the child's mind, so, taking her by the hand, said to her, "So, my child, you wish to remain here with us?" She answered only with a nod of the head and by wiping away the tears which filled her eyes. So she remained.

The tents and hammocks were soon put in order, and the wounded were with little delay, in the hands of the medical staff of the army, receiving even better attention than could be given them under the close roof of a building, owing to the high temperature of the summer air.

Swithun and his assistants, among whom the little Princess was a conspicuous figure, followed the army surgeons from tent to tent and from hammock to hammock. The first greeting from Swithun which each patient received, whether freeman or slave, was a word of prayer that God would bless him and heal his wounds; never forgetting to tell those who had been nailed to the trees to remember that the Saviour of the world, so innocent of any wrong, had suffered the same punishment.

Then would be passed to them for their refreshment any delicacy which their fancy prompted ; the supply of everything needful having been sent by the people of the surrounding country in abundance.

As the sufferers looked upon the sweet, innocent face of the child Egberta, with such an expression of tender sympathy in her eyes, their hearts seemed touched. She would breathe to them, as she passed from hammock to hammock, some word that would lighten their burden of misery, often accompanied by a kiss, especially when the victim was an innocent child.

Thus did the little Princess spend nearly two days, in company with Swithun, casting rays of human sunshine into every bed of pain and suffering, fastening upon her mind and in her heart an object-lesson of the stories which her good friend had described so pathetically only a short time before.

As if to keep green in the memory of the sons and daughters of England the names and acts of those who nursed with such loving-kindness these unfortunate victims of Scandian cruelty, another Egberta in heart, Victoria, a thousand years later dedicated almost upon the spot where Swithun and

his little Sister of Mercy had cared for the maimed, a magnificent hospital for the wounded and disabled soldiers of the kingdom.

Three days after this visit of pirates to Southampton, the same number—and doubtless the identical boats and crew—sailed up the Colne, and attacked the old walled town of Colchester, where equally cruel treatment was meted out to its unfortunate inhabitants. Although an older place, —having been founded by Claudius in the time of Nero,—it did not contain as valuable plunder for the marauders as Southampton.<sup>1</sup>

It was afterwards learned that the Scandian visitors to both these places were only foraging boats from the great fleet under the desperate Hastings, then lying on the Frankish coast.

<sup>1</sup> Colchester was the home of the unfortunate British Queen Boadicea, who resented the wrongs inflicted upon her by the Romans, and rather than to fall into their hands a prisoner, poisoned herself.





## CHAPTER XVI

**I**N the times about which we are writing, kingly nature seemed prompted by a spirit akin to that which is not unknown to-day.

King Regner Lodbrok of Denmark, the first of that name, had within his borders many desperate characters. They were so lawless that he must, in justice to his own people, either condemn them to punishment himself, or rid his country of them by banishment.

There was one desperado, by the name of Hastings, who had committed so many terrible crimes that he had reached the condition of an outlaw. The Danish King felt in his heart that wherever this man went his inbred criminal nature would remain unchanged. But as Hastings had the blood of an earl in his veins, the ruler of Denmark was willing to give him a chance for his life and his liberty, if he would consent to live elsewhere and breathe the air of freedom on other than Danish soil.

As was customary with those incurable criminals upon whom the Danish authorities hesitated to impose the full legal penalty for their crimes, these privileged characters were allowed to have their fate decided by lot. In the case of Hastings the game of chance gave to him the well-known title of Viking, on condition that he would never again set foot in Denmark.

The name of Viking, as already explained, was one of chivalry and honor. It not only conferred upon the holder a position on sea equal in power to that of the petty king of those days upon land, but he was urged, if not entreated, by the land power sending him forth, to enrich himself as much as possible by taking the property of any other country, especially if its people were not believers in their god Odin.

Thus expelled from his own land, Hastings went forth a wanderer on the sea, as Ishmael had on land when turned from the door of Abraham. But before he left the shores of Denmark, the King had provided him with one of the largest and best equipped fleets of boats that had ever left that country, possibly not less than three hundred in number.

As an evidence of King Regner's confidence in Hastings to take care of himself, he allowed his



own son Ivar to accompany him on his voyage of banishment, to learn from him the art of pillage and slaughter.

Hastings sailed directly to the mouth of the river Loire on the Bay of Biscay, and made Belle Isle and the smaller islands in the vicinity his headquarters, from which to set out on his exploits of plunder. Quite to his surprise, he found the people of Brittany, his close neighbors, not only friendly, but some were even disposed to aid him in his unlawful expeditions.

When not engaged in some greater enterprise, small detachments from this large fleet would sail in search of plunder wherever treasure worthy of their time and steel could be found.

It was learned that the marauders who had visited Southampton and Colchester, alluded to in the last chapter, were from this fleet in the Franko-Spanish bay on the opposite side of the Channel.

Hastings, although one of the most cruel and lawless of sea-robbers, was not without his share of general knowledge, and was especially well informed of the strong and weak hands which wielded power in the two countries he had marked as his prey,—Britain and the great Frankish Empire.

In the ninth and tenth centuries, the history of

these two powers are so closely identified—especially so far as relates to the Northmen—that they should be read jointly if a clear insight into the history of either is sought.

In forming his plans Hastings reasoned wisely from a robber's standpoint. In their castles, churches, and monasteries the Franks had, in secreted wealth, tenfold that of Britain. Charles Martel and his grandson Charlemagne, the savage watch-dogs of the Western Empire, either of whom no power on earth would dare confront, were both dead. In the hands of their successors,—Pepin and the weak, but good and pious, Lewis,—of the strong bands of steel which had held the interests of that country so firmly together, there remained only traces in dust. While under the present King, Charles the Bald,—always overwhelmed in wrangles with claimants for his own crown,—the Franks were left in the pitiable condition of local self-government, or to be tossed upon the sea of anarchy. Oh, for a shadow of the great Charlemagne, and one gleam from his avenging Gaudiosa!

Frankland was then to become the hunting-ground for this viking of the North for all large game, while his mosquito fleets would harass Britain for prizes of less value.

With a crew thirsting for blood, Hastings started up the Loire. For the whole distance between its mouth and the city of Tours, one hundred and forty miles, he ravaged its coasts without any show of resistance, the inhabitants fleeing at his approach in terror and despair. The city of kings and bishops, the garden of France, then the most important place in the Empire, was reached on a cloudy night. The people were in a state of panic. Some had already fled to the interior of the country, while others were leaving in great numbers.

A herald had brought news of the threatened danger several hours in advance. Every man who could wield an axe or sword had been mustered into the army of defence. Tours, teeming with wealth in buildings, relics, and treasure, must be defended at all hazard, no matter at what cost of life.

The quays along the over-flushed river were lined with armed men, whose steel habits and weapons glistened as the lights from the adjacent windows fell upon them. At each avenue through the city's imperfect walls was stationed a band of defenders. Every rampart was fully manned. Scouts had been sent down the river to light beacons of alarm when the marauders first came in view. At the head of every company of protectors was a bishop, abbot,

or priest ; the two former wearing their sacred mitres and all holding, high in the air, a shining cross of silver.

The bishops no longer regarded these creatures as mere despoilers of property, but as agents in the hands of the Devil to destroy the Church.

Scarcely had a beacon cast its first ray upon the cloudy sky in the west, when the sound of a thousand oars, dipping in the waters with clock-like precision, fell upon every ear. Both shores of the river were shrouded in darkness. The bugle of danger was sounded, every company answered, but before the echo of the last trumpet died away, the south bank of the Loire far below the city was ablaze with light. Hundreds of resin torchlights flashed forth at the same instant. The glittering armor and gleaming weapons of the Northmen hove in sight ; their numbers were legion. Close to the river's edge, where one of the cavalry barracks is now located, was a barricade, just within the walls. From this the first sally on the Scandians was made through the well guarded breach.

Onward pressed the ranks of the Danes. By the light cast from the advancing torches could be seen the deadly blows of the Northman's axe and sword. Rapidly the defenders fell back. At last they fled

in wild panic. Not a breach in any of the three ranks of the heathen horde had been made, so perfect was their discipline. First the warrior, then the torch-bearer, and last the looter. With the compact ranks of men at dress-parade, they chased the fleeing Franks, cutting them down as grain falls before the cradle-scythe.

Every armed Frank rushed to the aid of the first defenders, only to share their fate, or join in the general rout. The western part of the city was already in the deadly grip of the Northmen. Their torches had fired several buildings; the dark streets they had passed through were beginning to shine brightly from fires they had kindled.

The looters were hurrying plunder to the boats like beasts of burden. The screams of men, women, and children filled the air in every direction. No further attempt was made at defence. Citizens with arms and without, of all ages and sexes, thought only of escape or shelter. The proud city of Tours was abandoned to the mercy of its savage plunderers. Thousands had sought possible safety under the seats and in the nooks of the great Amphitheatre. Others crowded the grand and mighty Basilica of Saint Perpetuus, beautiful in adornment and rich in treasure. This was quickly sacked and everything of

compact value carried to the boats, while many of the unfortunates within its walls were killed and maimed.

Then word came to Hastings that the boats were already filled with plunder. In his heart he was not sorry—the people had made so weak a defence that he was glad to stay the slaughter. The bugler sounded the call for muster at the boats and the men under his direct command formed in marching order and started towards the river. They reached a temple they had not pillaged,—the Cathedral of Saint Martin, named after the great apostle to the Gauls. At its façade stood a small body of Frankish soldiers, but they scattered in all directions at Hastings's approach.

Through the half-open door a number of bishops and priests could be seen, some kneeling at the altar in prayer, others patrolling the nave of the church with the mark of terror upon their faces. Orders were at once given to enter the building. In an instant the great door was closed and barred within. "Scarcely a priest has been slain," shouted Hastings, at the top of his voice; "*break in the door!*"

Almost as quick as the words had left his lips, two huge rocks were hurled against it. It did not yield. Again they were thrown with terrific force, and it opened. Hastings was the first to enter.

He looked bewildered. All was as silent as the tomb—not a living creature could be seen. “Guard every way of escape, but do not touch a thing within the building,” he said. Then, with a company of twenty men, he searched every corner of the temple above and below. Not a human being could be found. He returned to the nave, surveyed in silence the magnificent altar, with its rich decorations, gazed up at the beautiful figure of the Madonna over the gorgeous throne of the bishop. Upon the wall to the right of this figure, in letters of gold upon celestial blue, were the fifty-one new canons recently proclaimed by Charlemagne. Upon a table in front of the throne was an open copy of the New Testament, written in letters of gold upon a vellum tinted with blue.

On the left wall of the altar was a master figure of our Saviour upon the cross, with a face sweet, but sad. Over it were the words, *Ecce Homo*. From tall candles of all colors, placed in candelabra wrought in gold and silver inlaid with precious stones, a hallowed light was shed upon this sacred scene. Upon the face of Hastings there was neither the look of disappointment nor bloody vengeance. For once he seemed puzzled, if not profoundly impressed.

He gave orders not to disturb an article in the building, but to march at once to the boats. While this man walked in silence through the streets filled with burning buildings, the work of his hand, was he not nursing a little of the superstition which grew so rankly in his Northern home? He never made known his thoughts, but it seems fair to suppose he looked upon the sudden disappearance of those bishops and priests as the work of some god—like the vanishing of Skidbladner with Odin and his twelve saints beneath the ocean when he first appeared in the North?

If, however, he had known the secret escapes from the cathedral as well as those who vanished in such a cloud of mystery, he would have followed them through an underground passage to the far-away chapel of Saint Martin, where he would have found them kneeling around the shrine of that good saint, praying, "*Save us from the hands of the cruel Northmen!*"—a clause thereafter inserted in the prayer-book of the Church in Frankland.

This sudden change, then, in Hastings's demeanor, viewed upon the surface would favor the thought that a twinge of guilt had smitten his heart for his treatment of the Christians, and that a tender cord was really drawing him towards belief in the Chris-



tian faith. His future course of action, however, leaves little doubt that what he saw in the Cathedral of Saint Martin prompted him rather to become a most perfect actor in the rôle of the hypocrite. The scourge which he had inflicted upon the people on both shores of the Loire, he soon repeated on the Seine—completely sacking Rouen of what little treasure its citizens had not removed in their flight in advance of his coming. From Rouen he hastened to Paris, only to find that the people of that deserted city had left even less of value behind them than others in the north had done.

But Hastings was not to be thwarted in his purpose. King Charles was there and, although securely locked up in his strong castle of St. Denis, was almost dying of fright at the approach of the merciless Scandian. Harassed and threatened until his position became desperate, the King purchased the departure of his dreaded foe from his kingdom for seven thousand pounds of silver.





## CHAPTER XVII

**I**T would have done no violence to Hastings' conscience to have kept up his robberies in the domain of Charles the Bald, in the face of his solemn pledge to withdraw; but he longed for a field of greater wealth.

He had no home nor place where he could live in peace, even if he desired to do so, for Denmark, the land of his birth, had branded him an outlaw, where immediate death awaited him should he dare to return.

On a trip to Britain, with its meagre prospects for plunder, he showed the lip of scorn. The name of Rome had always haunted his mind as a city teeming with immense wealth. Just where it was, or how it could be reached, he did not know. He was well aware that the distance was great and the trip a hazardous one for small boats such as composed his fleet. But instead of danger and risks daunting a man of his daring and courage, he gloried in facing

and conquering them. His whole fleet, therefore, was soon headed south, in the direction of the ancient Imperial City, a distance almost equal to that travelled by Columbus on his first voyage of discovery to America, six hundred years later.

From Belle Isle this great family of three hundred cockle-shell boats sailed southwest and soon rounded Corunna Point on the Spanish coast. Here they encountered a heavy gale, tossing the little crafts upon the whitecaps like egg-shells; but Hastings evinced no fear, for every boat had upon its bow and stern the wooden image of one of the Scandian gods and upon its masthead the figure of the enchanted raven.

Thus protected these staunch little galleys danced merrily upon the waves as if inviting danger rather than dreading it. They then hugged the Spanish and Portuguese coast until Gibraltar was reached, when their course was changed easterly, over the Mediterranean.

The island of Corsica, by the route thus travelled, was passed about fifty miles to the south. The first object which came in view on the land far to the east was a city whose formidable walls seemed to frown defiantly upon them. Hastings, in his ignorance, at once concluded that it was no other than

mighty Rome itself, whereas, in the end, it proved to be only the ancient city of Luna, which in its prime was embraced within the circuit of Pisa, one of the famous twelve Etruscan cities, whose combined power so often curbed the vaunting ambition of Rome, their young but stalwart rival to the south.

Hastings lost no time in making a landing, and at once attempted to force an entrance through the city gates, but was driven back with the loss of a large number of men. He soon discovered that the troops who guarded the entrance to this place, enclosed within its massive walls, could not be affrighted with the ease of those who had defended the Frankish cities. Assault after assault was made upon this stronghold, with all the fierceness that these intrepid pirates could summon to their aid, but the defenders presented as cool a front of defiance as Hastings and his men displayed impetuous fury in their charges.

The viking outlaw was convinced that at last he had met men worthy of his steel. He was not long, therefore, in changing his tactics. Bravery and a fanatic trust in his god of war had never before failed him; as it now had done so, he must resort to other means. He feigned penitence in his defeat, and sought an interview with the general in

charge of the army of defence. He was admitted within the walls for a conference, unattended by any of his men. Passing his own personal weapons over to the general, he confessed defeat; admitted that he was a heathen, and attributed his failure to his disbelief in Christianity and his past persecution of the followers of that faith.

He also pleaded poverty, and said that his large body of men would starve unless the people of Rome would befriend him and furnish him with a good supply of money and provisions before they sailed away. He promised, on the sanctity of an oath, that if the city would give him a stipulated weight in gold and silver, he would become a Christian and consent not only to be baptized himself into the Christian faith, but would act as a missionary and teach the new religion amongst his own men and others with whom he might come in contact.

It was unfortunate for Hastings that he was talking with people who were too familiar with pirates and their faithless pledges. Although Hastings was careful to conceal who he really was, it was suspected that the man before them was no other than the arch-pirate Hastings, of whose acts of perfidy and cruelty they had heard so much from their friends and allies in Frankland.

The general smiled at his proposition, and replied that it could not be considered for a moment. His terms were the surrender of himself and all his men, and his whole fleet of boats, into the hands of the city, on whose mercy he must rely for their fate. At this, Hastings' face became first deadly pale, then it flushed to a crimson. He fell upon the ground in a fit; he struggled and gasped. At last he had all the appearance of a dead man. There was no sign of breathing, his heart seemed without pulse. When all hope of returning life appeared to be over, Hastings' men were invited within the walls to take charge of the body of their chief, being especially enjoined to leave their arms on board of the boats. When surrounded by all his friends, the wily viking sprang from his bier and gave the command to slaughter the people and pillage the city. The Scandians drew forth their concealed weapons and began the carnage with all the ferocity of their nature. In a few hours Luna was sacked and many of its people killed. But when Hastings learned that, instead of being at Rome, he had wasted all his time and strategy upon the beggarly city of Luna, he foamed at the mouth in anger at his mistake. The plunder, of course, proved but a paltry pittance. Although Hasting was in a place whose

surface was poor, indeed, in treasure, if he had been endued with the gifts of an Odin he could, while in his brief mock trance, have emerged from it with a stock of wisdom rivalling that of the gods. He was then on soil most sacred to Odin and all his followers. Before the wolf had nursed to life Romulus and Remus, the twin founders of Rome, Etruria, of which Luna formed a part, was in the zenith of her power and glory, the home of all the weird mythology of the East. Even Æsar, the godhead to whom Odin himself bowed in reverence, was said to be of Etruscan creation. Had Hastings in his trance, therefore, been able to delve through the plague-stricken debris upon which Luna stood and travel through the miles of labyrinthian passages, said to connect the twelve Etruscan cities with each other, he would, as a heathen, have found himself on hallowed ground.

He would have passed through tombs the most gigantic, as well as the most unique and beautiful in specimens of sculptured art, filled with articles of jewelry, the relics of the entombed in life, which the modern artist has failed to rival in design or value. Also other homes of the dead cut by the sculptor's hand, in facsimile of the mansion in life, which the creature now reduced to ashes within an

urn occupies, adorned by every article he cherished while in the flesh, including the sacred paintings of his gods.

If the tomb were that of a warrior, the helmet, shield, and sword which he carried in war were there reproduced upon everlasting marble, for which the quarries of Luna were famous—a custom which savors much of that now in vogue in China, except that the Chinese bury their dead above ground, while the Etruscans went to the extreme of burying very far below.

He would also have found within those hidden mazes, traces of many things which Rome borrowed from the Etruscan to add to her renown. The hall of the athlete, the ring of the gladiator, the figure of the procession of triumph, the toga of imperial purple, and the origin of the twelve lictors representing the twelve cities of Etruria, whose wealth and culture Rome, after so many years of cruel war, called its own, were all of Etruscan birth. He would have found, too, buried beneath this debris of pestilence and death, the famous temple of Fate, the home of the weird Sibyl, who trod the earth and communed with the gods for a thousand years and embraced in her venerated oracles all the known wisdom with which the world had ever been



blessed,—past, present, and future. Within this temple he might have found leaves of the yellow papyrus upon which the renowned twelve Sibylline books were written, the quill from the raven's wing with which they were indited, and a black jar encircled by the figure of a serpent, containing dragon's blood, used as writing-fluid.

Possibly, too, the three of these renowned books sold to the last Tarquin for an immense sum of money, had been spirited back by the enchantress herself, to keep company with the six she declared had been burnt and the other three whose existence she had wrapt in profound mystery. If so, the twelve books complete would have been in this mystic chamber, representing one for each Etruscan city, as claimed by this ancient nation.

Upon the cover of each he would have found the figure of the augur, dressed in royal purple and carrying in his hand the crook of wisdom and power. From the pages of the Sibylline books could be learned the voice of the gods on every mystery of life, as told through the stars, the flight of birds, and other mediums, which are unique and legion in number—such as the good omen in the fowl which would drop a kernel of grain while feeding; that portending good luck in the lightning flash from left to

right, and doom in the reverse direction; why any public or other meeting of importance ceased whenever a storm of thunder and lightning began,—it was the voice of the gods against it. Before calling together any public body to begin war or declare peace, this sacred book of the Sibyl was always consulted by the augur.

Hastings would have found, too, cut in marble, the picture of the mystic dance, in which a number of beautiful females were represented as moving their limbs with such expressive grace as to tell in gesture, without uttering a single word, some marvellous story or legend, which the onlookers could interpret as easily as if written in the plainest script.

But Hastings then, like the man of more modern times, worshipped the Golden Calf more devoutly than he venerated his gods or their relics. He, however, left Luna with even less wealth than he brought to her gates.





## CHAPTER XVIII

**D**URING the score of years or less while Hastings was carrying the pirate's flag of fire and sword through Frankland and the southeast, many changes were going on in Britain, especially in Wessex.

King Ethelwulf and his sons Ethelbald and Ethelbert were all dead. Wessex was in the hands of Egbert's two surviving grandsons, Ethelred and Alfred, who possibly reigned jointly. Never in its history had the kingdom been tossed upon such a sea of trouble; lowering clouds, with the forked flash of danger, covered its sky in all directions, ready to burst at any moment.

In the meantime, Swithun the Good had died, after having worn the purple robe of Canterbury for ten years. Although next in rank to the king, he left behind him a second title, far more enduring than that of royalty itself,—the friend of the poor and the distressed. As an evidence of their love,

rich and poor—who alike had come within his gentle influence—combined to honor him in death, as few persons in Wessex had ever been honored before.

A monument, or even a shrine, artistic and costly, on the most prominent site within the cathedral, was his by right of title and position, and this all Winchester resolved he should have. But when the will of the deceased Archbishop was made public, he had decreed that all ostentation or display at his funeral should be omitted; that the services be of the most simple kind, such as would be held over the body of a destitute parishioner; that all the poor of the vicinity should have the preference of being present. Moreover, it was his request that, contrary to custom, his body should not be entombed within the walls of the cathedral, but should be buried in a common grave in the churchyard, where the poorest people were laid to rest.

So minutely were Swithun's wishes defined in his will, that even the plot in the outside burying-ground where his body should be put, was named and described, which, when examined, was found to be between the graves of two indigent persons, so that no opportunity was given in space for even a decent monument to mark his resting-place.

The desires of the Archbishop, however, were

carried out to the letter; but some years later, King Ethelbert and the clergy of Winchester, with a full knowledge of the terms of Swithun's will, decided to remove his remains and give them sepulture and a suitable monument within the cathedral.

The 15th day of July was chosen for the ceremony of removal, and all Winchester had made great preparations to honor the occasion, and thus show their love for their old friend. The people from the surrounding country, far and near, had gathered in the famous city to do homage to the name of one who had deservedly earned the title of the most popular man in Wessex. Early in the morning black threatening clouds gathered in the sky. The sun was scarcely two hours high when rain began to fall, and before it was time for the ceremonies to begin, the downpour was so heavy that the men who were exhuming the remains were obliged to stop work before they had time to remove the coffin. The heavy rainfall was considered only temporary, so the crowds sought shelter in different parts of the city until it should cease. Hour after hour the clouds sent down their contents, much to the disappointment of the throngs of drenched people crouched under every protecting roof. Hours of continuous rain stretched into days;

days into weeks—until this unprecedented storm reached its fortieth day.

The ceremonies of removal were abandoned. The King, clergy, and people considered the interruption a visitation of Providence for acting contrary to the expressed wishes of the late Archbishop. Although previous to this the name of Swithun was mentioned with an air of veneration, this incident surrounded it with much greater sanctity—in fact, with the army of the poor and down-trodden, his name was thereafter coupled with divinity itself.

This prolonged rain-storm has given rise to the adage which is believed by many of the credulous, even to this day, that if it rains on Saint Swithun's day, it will rain every day for forty more in succession. Many years after this notable incident a chapel was built over Swithun's grave, whom the pope in the meantime had canonized. As mentioned in a previous chapter, this chapel soon became a shrine to which many thousands flocked every year, believing that a visit to the resting-place of this good man's bones would cure them of all their bodily ailments—a delusion which no one, probably, would have rebuked more promptly than the sainted Swithun himself, could he have been there in the flesh to confront their superstition.

In the death of Swithun, Egberta had lost a friend and counsellor whom she could never replace—one who had moulded her character, shaped her life, and had planned and seen put in motion the future grand aims and objects of this young Princess.

She had developed into a very beautiful woman, influenced, however, by a kindred heart and the sweet example of Swithun's career. She had resolved never to marry, but to devote her whole life to comforting the poor, caring for the sick, and ministering to those who crave the gentle touch of the nurse and the kind word of sympathy in their hour of distress and suffering.

She had already enlisted in this noble work a score or more of other ladies, mostly unmarried, and, under the sanction of the Archbishop, had named their order "The Band of Mercy."

Perhaps at no epoch in English history was the costume of the lady less adapted to the work which this order would engage in, than what was then worn. It consisted of very wide sleeves, with the body of the dress double the required size in girth, and trailing at least a quarter of its length upon the ground.

A simple robe of dark gray, absolutely plain, fitted snugly to the body, with short, close-fitting

sleeves, the dress itself reaching at least four inches above the ankles, with a small white cross worked upon the breast—this, together with a plain white turban for the head, was agreed upon as the costume for the Band.

At the time of which we write, this *Band of Mercy* had already stepped beyond its local existence, and had entered the broader field of nursing the sick and wounded in the army. This broadening of their sphere had become general after the death of Swithun, whose wisdom and goodness of heart were now greatly missed. King Ethelred—with the concurrence of the clergy of Winchester—demurred to allowing the Band to nurse and care for the sick and wounded Scandians—a right which Egberta boldly contended for on the ground that the word *mercy* could not be honestly used in the name of their order unless both friend and foe were to receive the same kindness at their hands.

As a precedent to uphold his refusal, the King cited the cry of Egbert at the battle of Hengston Hill, “*No quarter to the Outlaw!*” The question was made thus prominent because in a recent encounter with the Scandians in Kent, in which they had suffered defeat, some of the wounded of the enemy, notably the son of a Norwegian earl, had



been, without the knowledge of Ethelred or his men, nursed by Egberta's own hand; and after his recovery this prominent young man made good his escape and fled to his own country.

Egberta, however, made a touching appeal to the King in favor of treating all alike, in which the case of the Good Samaritan and other Gospel passages were freely quoted, with effect. The King and clergy at last yielded to her entreaties.





## CHAPTER XIX

**I**T cannot be doubted that the career of Hastings as already given fully justified the Danish King in banishing him for life from his native country. But, unfortunately for Regner Lodbrok, who made him an exile, his record as a pirate is shown to be even worse than that of Hastings himself. History points the index finger quite plainly to an expedition up the Seine in charge of Regner, which arrived at Paris on a certain Easter eve, and was even more cruel and bloody than that conducted by Hastings when Charles the Bald was frightened out of his seven thousand pounds in silver.

Whether the success of Hastings in raiding the treasury of the Frankish King prompted Regner to make his visit, or *vice versa*, is uncertain. The dates of both descents occur so nearly together that who made the first remains in doubt. Although Hastings during his twenty years of outlawry had molested Britain only in a small way, the ravages

of the Norwegians and even the Danes under King Regner and others had been incessant and disastrous to the welfare of the whole island. So serious had this scourge become that much of the land, especially in the north, remained untilled, and the people were in consequence threatened with famine and its sister horror—plague.

Although quite twenty years had been given to Regner in which to repent of the outrages he had committed upon the inhabitants of both Frankland and Britain, not even a twinge of conscience was in evidence. On the contrary, we find him now preparing for an assault on Britain on a larger scale than he had ever before attempted.

When his ships were in readiness to start, the figure of the arrow, the King's emblem of war, was sent to each of his earls and champions, as notice to prepare for the voyage. On the morning of the day for sailing, Regner's Queen, Aslauga, besought the King to abandon the trip if he would spare his own life and that of his companions. She related in her pathetic appeal how, in a dream that night, she had seen the Midgard-Serpent thrust its monstrous head for a moment from beneath the ocean and swallow the ships in which he and his company were to sail, and all on board; and in returning to its home be-

neath the waters, give one lash with its tail which set the mighty sea in a foam of raging fury. So great was the commotion that no craft could possibly live upon the angered mountains of water.

Regner looked pale when he beheld in Aslauga's face an expression of dread and alarm. She seemed indeed to take on the visage of a goddess. When she had expressed in words from the depth of her heart the awful fate of her King as foreshadowed in her dream, she clasped him by the hand and fell upon her knees at his feet, fixing a gaze upon his face which almost conquered the dauntless will of Regner.

So overcome was the Queen that she fell prostrate upon the floor in a swoon, and in that unconscious condition he left her in the care of a servant and hastened towards the ships, where his companions awaited him at the old floating dock, made of logs, not far from the modern port of Copenhagen.

When his earls and champions greeted him, they noticed in their King's face something unusual, the mark of great distress. Naturally robust and ruddy, his strong frame now shook with tremor; even his teeth chattered; his hand was cold and his face pale. In answer to all inquiries he was silent. He waved his hand for the boats to start and they were headed

north towards Iceland. A fresh breeze was blowing, just enough to fill the sails and make the sailors happy. Not a cloud was in the sky. So uneventful did the trip promise to be, that before sunset Regner's old-time spirit returned and he was again himself; and so continued for more than two days, until Old Skagen Point had been doubled and the boats were several hours on the open sea with their noses turned directly towards the British coast.

About ten o'clock on the third night out, the wind stiffened to what might be called a strong blow. Two or three black clouds had collected some miles in advance of the boats' course. Then distant lightning began to draw pictures in shapes that the mind could form into any image of creature or thing that the fancy desired to paint.

While the boats were sailing towards it, the storm had at the same time moved in the direction of the boats. Dark clouds fringed with white, which covered almost the whole heavens, now hovered very close to the water. Lightning began to flash vividly upon the waves, which rolled in their anger like shifting mountains of snow. Thunder pealed forth in rapid succession, and the cannonade of heaven became terrifically grand.

The North Sea could not allow its reputation to

suffer, hence the heavy blow was quickly changed to a hurricane. Regner had again lost his voice and sat on deck motionless and speechless. The tremor which shook his body on the day of sailing had returned with increased force. His upturned face, upon which the lightning flashed without ceasing, was now deadly pale. So unprecedented was this conduct of their King—who never before had shown the weakness of fear—that all his friends were puzzled.

No one presumed to approach him or speak a word loud enough to be heard above the deafening thunder. His thoughts were his own. No one, other than himself, had the slightest idea what they were, or what had produced such an entire change in their King.

In the eyes and dazed mind of Regner, however, the flashes of lightning upon the black clouds were shaping pictures that to him were startlingly real. He could see plainly the figure of Aslauga, his Queen, smitten with death, being borne away in the arms of her nurse; the terrible image of the Midgard-Serpent, with its great open mouth, swallowing the ships which composed their little fleet as easily as a dog could swallow a gnat.

For once he shifted his eyes below to the billows

of water rolling high above the gunwale of the boat, and there his fancy beheld the tail of the monster lashing the sea into a fury—a sight more terrible than he had ever witnessed before.

Then again he looked upwards to the clouds ablaze with fire, now slightly eastward of the boat. He could not be deceived in what he saw,—there was the figure of a Valkyr, clothed in her robe of crimson, grasping in her hand the glittering spear in the attitude of descent towards him. Another flash of lightning, followed by another peal of thunder, and the Valkyr vanished. Then came a terrific crash upon the deck, and the mast of the ship fell within a few feet of where he sat, upon the top of which was the figure of the enchanted raven, now with its wings shattered, and its severed head thrust upon his lap.

Several men had been washed overboard, including one earl. Every one on board, including the King, was now tightly lashed to the side of the boat, as no hand could do aught towards controlling its course. It must drift at the mercy of the storm. In the darkness all the boats had become separated; no knowledge whatever could be gained as to the direction in which they were drifting, nor where they were.

In the great suspense, the duration of the hurricane seemed without time limit. The fury of the storm ceased, however, as suddenly as it came. To the surprise of all, when the sea quieted down to its normal state it was found that the storm had raged less than an hour.

The dismasted ship, without sail or even oars to propel it, was tossed aimlessly upon the waves till daylight. With an emergency sail, the land, which was at last sighted, was in due time reached. It proved to be home—the shores of Denmark; and not many miles from Hansted, almost the last point of land they had seen as they shifted their course to the west on the previous afternoon.







## CHAPTER XX

**W**HEN Regner arrived home he found his wife Aslauga prostrated almost to the point of death. At beholding his face she became ecstatic, believing it to be only his phantom, for her feverish day visions and night dreams since he had left, all foreshadowed his death. When, therefore, she actually saw her husband once more in the flesh, the glow of health began to return to her cheek and in a few days she was almost well again.

If Regner Lodbrok ever lacked faith in his god Odin, or the vaporous images which are painted in dreams, all doubts were now removed. But no man could be as cruel as this King and not have in his nature a towering stock of self-will.

Regner, contrary to his nature, grew reticent, not to say morose. Two powers within him were waging a terrible battle—superstition on the one hand, and his strong will-power on the other. For days and even weeks he wandered about the palace,

rarely exchanging a word even with those who were his intimates. His strong human nature threatened at times to conquer; then, when he beheld the face of Aslauga he would hesitate, for in her every look he always fancied he could see the stamp of prophetic power, if not the impress of a goddess.

The struggle could not last long; it had already left the imprint of care upon the lines of Regner's face. As the fumes of a debauch evaporate from its victim, so the shadows of what this man had seen on that memorable night upon the North Sea began to fade from his memory, to be recalled only as a mirage to affright the mind for a moment, then vanish like a fog before the sun.

The animal won the contest. An order was given by the King to build a few staunch boats and to repair those damaged by the storm, with a view of making a second start for Britain. This project was, however, carefully kept from the ears of the Queen; but before the day arrived for sailing she had learned all about it. At this Regner became furious, and threatened to put to death the betrayer of his confidence if it could be learned who it was; which was never done.

The Queen besought Regner with redoubled pathos to abandon the trip he proposed to make,—

all with no avail. Such was the power that Aslauga wielded over her husband, however, that he feared another interview would deter him from the undertaking, so he adroitly absented himself from the palace and never saw her again.

The outfit being ready, the fleet sailed out under most favorable auspices. The weather was delightful and the boats, and their trimmings as well, were all that could be desired. Regner had protested against those on the previous voyage, which had proved so disastrous, as being too large, thus making them unwieldy when caught in a storm.

The present fleet had a larger number of ships, but much smaller in length, beam, and draught. The run was a great success ; they reached the shores of Northumbria in considerably less time than was expected. Fortunately for the purpose of their visit, an eastward gale struck their fleet just as they were about to pass Spurn Head and enter the broad estuary of the Humber, causing them to scud up that historical river so swiftly as to give the appearance of having been driven in against their will, being unable to control their craft.

They made a landing at what is now Hull, a little west of the river of the same name. After fastening their boats and leaving a few watchers in charge to

see that they were not disturbed, the swarm of well armed marauders hurried inland towards York—their objective point.

Scandian visits had become so frequent of late that the country between Hull and York, instead of having its usual abundant supply of food, was as bare as if every inch of productive ground had been swept by Egyptian locusts. These incessant robberies had, however, caused the disheartened settlers to maintain a vigilant watch for the approach of their tormenters, and thus to warn the militia to be in readiness to meet them.

The once thriving port of modern Hull had been abandoned for years, and its inhabitants had sought safety from the invaders by scattering themselves through the inland districts. So complete was the desertion when Regner landed, that not even a horse could be found for the use of the King; much less a number sufficient to supply the earls and others who preferred riding to conducting a campaign on foot.

If Regner, however, had been on one of the principal roads, a few miles from where his ships were fastened, an hour or so earlier, he would have seen a horse worthy to bear the sacred person of a king. It was being ridden by a native

of the soil at a breakneck speed towards York. Moreover, had he watched closely when his boats were about midway between Spurn Head and the river Hull, he would have seen a dilapidated building quite close to the sandy wash on the north side of the Humber. From an opening in the west end of this old structure, once used as a window, fluttered, almost an hour before he rounded the Head, a large piece of red flannel, giving warning to a watcher near Hull of the approach of a suspicious fleet.

It was in response to this signal that the horse had dashed northwest at such a great speed, the country in every direction from Hull being so flat that a ride of at least fifteen miles had to be made before a hill high enough on which to place a beacon signal to give warning to the one south of the city of York could be reached. So fleet-footed had this horse been, that before Regner and his men had reached Market Weighton they were suddenly surrounded by a large body of troops, who sprang suddenly from their concealment under a wide stretch of swamp-grass. So well planned was the surprise, and so strong the assaulting party, that the Scandinavians were soon overpowered. It was not, however, until the field was strewn with their dead, that the

invaders relaxed the desperate use of their weapons. It was in the midst of this bloody fight that the devotees of the weird mythology of the North pointed to one of its miracles.

While the Scandian axe-, swords-, and spearmen were being cut down right and left, the earls and champions sharing no better than the common warrior, King Regner Lodbrok himself, though assailed on all sides, did not receive a single wound, while every thrust of the sword and spear which he wielded against those who attacked him carried sure death with it.

At last, the legend declares, the great army of islanders who had inflicted almost universal slaughter upon the invading pirates, became panic-stricken, and retreated in a body—not one daring to draw near to the only remaining man, whom they felt was an enchanted being.

Whether toward a single island warrior or a hundred, the instant the dreaded Regner approached them they fled in terror. According to the legend, King Ella, the usurping King of Northumbria, who was in the fight, was so overcome at beholding the power of mystery which shielded this man that he ordered the casting of all weapons at him to cease; hearing which, Regner hurled his spear from him,

and threw up his hands. Scarcely had the spear touched the earth, when it was seized by several British warriors at the same moment. As a touch of this weapon by other than the hand of Regner meant death, they all fell lifeless to the ground, with the mystic spear clutched tightly in their hands.

The Danish King then walked towards Ella and surrendered himself. When his hands were fastened and his feet pinioned by two heavy pieces of metal, Regner gave the island King such a look of scorn that he winced at the fierceness of his glare. Then, casting his eyes upwards, the Dane said dramatically, "Ye have bound my limbs with wisps, but the power with which Odin hath clothed me, ye can never bind," striking his breast a ringing blow of defiance with his closed fist, to express in gesture, as well as in voice, the contempt in which he held his captors.

Never had it been the lot of the island people to have in their hands so mysterious a prisoner. He could not be killed by the usual weapons of war, as had been shown. The serious questions therefore arose: Who was he? What was he? What should be done with him? With these and many other queries troubling his mind, Ella stepped towards his strange captive and said:

“ As it is King Ella of Northumbria who addresses you, I demand to know who you are and what you are.”

Regner, with a sneer, fixed upon him a withering stare and replied :

“ Who is King Ella but a vassal ? How dare he to command a king whom Odin loves to honor to humble himself before him ? I refuse to answer your question, other than to say, he whom you now address was driven to your inhospitable shores in a storm, and this is the friendly treatment you have shown him.”

Not another word would Regner speak to Ella or any of his captors—to them his mouth was henceforth sealed. Threats were of no avail; neither were the questions and remarks with which he was besieged, often so offensive and insulting as to cause the blood in his cheeks to become purple and his eyes to flash with fire; not a word would he utter.

Then King Ella spoke out in anger: “ For your silent contempt, your punishment shall exceed anything ever inflicted upon a prisoner upon this island. *Cast him into the den of serpents !* ” Bound and manacled, he was carried several miles towards York, where, in a deep cave under a mountain, was a



ghastly chamber known to abound with venomous snakes.

According to the legend, into this terrible pit Regner was lowered. As the light from the torches was reflected into this chasm of horrors, hissing serpents—large and small—were seen crawling in and out of the crevices of the rocks.

Alarmed at being so near such loathsome creatures, in whose bite was certain death, even the watchers looked on with painful suspense. The conduct of Regner was stoical in the extreme. When he touched the bottom of the pit, he began to laugh and deride, bursting into a weird song of defiance which echoed strangely in this chamber of death. This alleged death-song of Regner rang out for centuries in the homes and halls of Scandia, made immortal in the fervor with which the poetic Edda clothed it in his legendary epic, vying in pathos even with the famous *Iliad* of Homer, in which he vivified his Trojan heroes. Now the watchers looked aghast! The rope by which Regner had been lowered was still fastened around his body, but its length allowed him to wander about the pit at will. He did so, pouring forth the streams of his defiant song, interspersed with fits of loud and boisterous laughter. Not a serpent approached

him. He pursued them and even reached forth his hand to grasp them, but they hissed and fled as he advanced. Instead of attacking, they were struggling to avoid him. Every crevice wherein they could hide was filled. They acted like reptiles fleeing from the terrors of fire.

What was the mystery of this man's power, and how could it be wrenched from him ? By order of King Ella he was lifted out of the pit and brought before him. The Northumbrian was amazed and bewildered. He offered to release his prisoner if he would say who he was. To this proposition Regner turned a deaf ear. " Perhaps his garments contain a charm. Strip him and put him into the pit naked," said Ella.

This changed the visage of Regner, but he would not deign to utter a word. When stripped, his undergarment was unlike anything ever seen by Ella or his friends. When he was again lowered into the pit, the serpents covered his body with their coils almost instantly, but although in the throes of so horrible a death, Regner was defiant, and died shouting, " How the young whelps would roar if they knew their father's fate."

When Ella learned who his victim was, he was at the same time informed of the Danish King's

charmed life. The spear that he had wielded with such deadly effect was the one with which legend says he had slain the great serpent of Thora—the fatal poison from which encounter could never be removed. The touching of it by any strange hand meant death.

The magic garment taken from him, which he always wore next to his skin, had been woven by the hand of his Queen, Aslauga, and blessed by her. It was made from silken grasses, brought to her by a Valkyr from Mount Ida, intertwined with her own auburn hair, and lined with the skin of the serpent of Thora, which Regner had killed with the spear of fate.





## CHAPTER XXI

**V**EILED as the whole life of the Danish King Regner Lodbrok is with mysteries and legends, there is no doubt that the principal acts of his reign have been quite honestly recorded by the historian. That he visited the island of Britain and met a tragic death at the hands of his captors, as described in the previous chapter, is a matter of history. Moreover, that the cruel death which Regner met in Britain, whatever its nature may have been, precipitated the early settlement of the Danes, as lords of the soil, in certain sections of the island, cannot be questioned.

When King Ella learned who the distinguished person was he had put to death, he lost no time in sending messengers to Denmark to inform Regner's royal household of all the circumstances. The sons of the murdered King were found in the castle, and when they saw the island messengers approach them, divined what news they brought; for, on the

very day that Regner's life had gone out, Queen Aslauga was stricken down and died in great agony.

The messengers were commanded by Ella to convey to the royal court of Denmark every particular of the unfortunate affair—to withhold nothing. The anger of Regner's sons when the ghastly details were made known had no bounds, their visages of pent-up vengeance fully justifying the last utterance of their ill-fated father, "How the young whelps would roar if they knew their father's fate."

The messengers met four sons. The one whose feelings seemed to boil more intensely for vengeance than the other three was Ivar, who afterwards became a conspicuous figure in the battles with Ethelred and Alfred. The other three, Sigurdr, Huitsork, and B'Jorn, never seem to have taken so active a part in British affairs.

The name of another, Ubba, however, who does not appear to have met the embassy from Ella, is found quite often, he acting in concert with Ivar in the war of revenge. The death of Regner aroused the spirit of vengeance against Britain in every Scandian heart. The feeling was no more bitter in Denmark—where the figure of the arrow, calling all to arms, was scattered over the whole land—than in Norway and Sweden. All three nations had robbed

Britain with impunity, hence all must combine to punish her for daring to protect her own firesides.

It was not long before a fleet in charge of no less than eight kings and twenty earls was headed towards the British coast, and made a landing in East Anglia, not many miles from the spot where Regner had moored his boats a few minutes before.

The coming of this bloodthirsty expedition was not unexpected; for when Ella had gathered from the messengers to the Danish court the feeling of the sons against him, he felt that the day of retribution would not long be delayed. Every available man for military duty in both Mercia and Northumbria was placed under arms, and a strong alliance between the two kingdoms was formed; the mutual interest in defence against the common enemy had already unified the action of the two thrones under their kings.

The Scandian forces—Danes and Norwegians—were legion in number, and after camping a while in East Anglia, for the condition of the roads over the fen country to improve, they started for Northumbria. A short distance northwest of Goole, not far from where the rivers Ouse and Derwent enter into the Humber, they met the combined forces of Ella, Osbert, and Burhed.

When the defenders saw the enemy in great swarms emerge from Thorne Moor they lost heart. They were prepared to meet man for man, but when they found they were outnumbered nearly two to one, their hopes waned.

Up to this time all visits of the Northmen had been to plunder and carry away all they could from the island. Their ambition now aimed to capture the country itself, and make it their home and compel the inhabitants to bend their necks to a foreign yoke.

The islanders, wishing to daunt them at the start by showing a bold front, advanced in good order to meet the invaders. Instead of the Scandians remaining in solid bodies, they formed into sparse columns and marched to the right and to the left of the islanders, who in less than thirty minutes were completely surrounded by the invaders. The Northmen began the battle by a deadly bow, axe, and sword assault, in which the defenders were cut down in great numbers, showing themselves no match for the fanatic Vikings. In less than an hour the forces of Ella, Osbert, and Burhed were in full retreat, scattering in all directions, leaving on the field nearly half their number in dead and wounded.

Ivar had marked King Ella from the first, and had a special body of warriors at his bidding to prevent his escape. Osbert, in the meantime, had been badly, if not fatally, wounded, and was carried from the field early in the fight. When the rout began, a horse was observed in the custody of a keeper some distance off, doubtless intended to aid Ella in his escape. Towards this spot the King was seen hurrying with all speed. Quickly the space between the fleeing Ella and the horse was filled with the guard of Ivar, and before he actually realized his danger, the murderer of Regner was a prisoner in the hands of the victim's son. So severely had the islanders suffered in the conflict, and so panic-stricken were those in retreat, that the Scandians did not pursue them far, but allowed them to scatter at will. The object of their special vengeance was in their hands alive; at which every man in the ranks of the victors rejoiced.

In the shifting of the battle and the retreat, a bend in the river Ouse had been reached near Selby. On a sandy point of land, shaped somewhat like the human ear, was growing a large ash tree, whose branches stretched quite over the crooked river itself. From the constant overflowing of the river's bank, the spreading roots of this tree had been undermined



by the wash, causing its great trunk to lean considerably over the stream.

The captors led their royal prisoner to this spot, stripped him bare, then nailed his body, belly downwards, to the leaning tree's trunk. After spiking his feet and hands securely, a Danish artist, an expert in human cruelty, cut with a sharp knife the figure of an eagle clutching a large serpent in its talons upon the back of their tortured victim.

Two terrible cuts were then made the whole length of the body, close to the backbone, through which each of the lungs were drawn and cast into the river, where they floated away.

After gloating over this spectacle of barbarous vengeance, the Scandian victors marched to York, where, in due time, Ivar was declared King of Northumbria—the first Danish foothold upon the island of Britain.





## CHAPTER XXII

THE battle described in the last chapter entirely changed the relations between the people of Britain and their tormenters from the North.

Up to this time the efforts of the islanders had all been in the direction of punishing them as robbers of their property. Now, however, it had become a question of who should inhabit the land and govern its people; with even a graver question somewhat hidden by the other,—who should control the religion of the inhabitants? Should it be in the hands of the Christian, now apparently the weaker element? Or should it again become pagan, dominated by the cruel and oppressive hand of the Scandian, who already had a territorial foothold upon the island?

From the human standpoint, these questions could elicit but one answer,—the weaker islander must submit to the stronger conqueror in both. Unified Britain under Egbert only thirty odd years

before, had already been shattered into many fragments, with every hand so weak that the defence and government of each king's own little domain seemed a thing impossible.

That the permanent settlement of the Dane on British soil was prompted by an overruling Providence, no one can call in question, as the influence of the Christian Angle and Saxon soon won the transplanted Danes to their faith and thereby caused the same religion not only to spread over Denmark, but also over Norway and Sweden. Thus it would seem that the divine hand purposely removed the Christian champion, Charlemagne, from Frankland, and Egbert, his companion, from Britain, so that the Northman, through his superior martial power of conquest, should be made to mingle with a Christian people, and breathe the air of Christian surroundings, and eventually become the helping hand in spreading the new religion over other lands.

But the hand of Providence, thus shown in the first Danish victory, should not rob Egbert, the strongest of the Saxon kings, of the credit due to him and bestow it without reserve or stint upon his grandson Alfred, some of whose weak characteristics we will endeavor to show briefly in the remaining chapters.

From the condition of the island—in its one-handed power—on the death of Egbert, there is no reason to doubt that had he been followed on the throne of Wessex by ability and self-will, instead of slothful imbecility, Britain, in 837, would have been under one strong hand as king of all England, instead of this unity being delayed forty years, leaving the island in the meantime at the mercy of the despoilers from the North.

Had Ivar been content to remain King of Northumbria, allowing other parts of the island to continue in the hands of the Saxon kings, perhaps no great effort would have been made to disturb him. But so elated was he over his victory at Selby, which an Egbert might have changed to a second Hengston Hill, that he was scarcely declared King before he crossed the Humber into Mercia, and showed his fanatic spirit by robbing and destroying every building, church, or monastery which held up the cross, killing priests and monks, as well as those who dared to lift a hand in their defence.

After pillaging the kingdom of every article his avarice craved, he marched to Nottingham, which he besieged and captured. In this critical dilemma, weak King Ethelwulf appealed to his relatives of Wessex, Ethelred and Alfred, for help. They re-

sponded promptly, and soon retook Nottingham and compelled Ivar to return to York.

It was during the siege of Nottingham that Ivar and his brother Ubba discovered that in Wessex they had met warriors their equal, if not their superiors, especially in their unprepared condition. Hitherto, with the Scandian, diplomacy was considered a thing unworthy of the man of war. Their only argument was the sword, spear, and axe. But the army of Wessex, their conquerors, in whose vice-like grip they were now caught, left them with three chances of possible escape,—to fight, with the prospect of utter annihilation; leave the shores of Britain and return to Denmark; or resort to the soft words of statecraft. They chose the latter, and the less crafty Ethelred and Alfred fell into the trap of the wily Dane.

It was agreed that Ivar should withdraw to York and confine his domain to Northumbria, and that the conquering army should return to Wessex. How Ivar must have smiled at such a concession on the part of Ethelred and Alfred, who at that moment had the life of every Dane upon the island at their mercy. At this moment, above all others, we believe Egbert would have shouted, “*No quarter to the Outlaw!*” and his command would have been

carried out to the bitter end, possibly resulting in closing the door for all time against the Dane's entrance into Britain.

By soft words and sacred promises made on the revered bracelets of Odin, in addition to which Alfred compelled the Christian oath, to increase the sanctity of observance, Ivar and Ubba secured just what they wished,—time enough to make full preparation for subduing all Britain. For Mercia itself was sought merely to make a highway to Wessex, the great strip of land in the extreme south, bounded by the English Channel, and stretching from Lizard Head, in Cornwall, to Ramsgate, the eastern limit of Kent—at that time the strongest military power and the only one feared by Ivar, as his experience with it at Nottingham had amply confirmed.

Within a year, Ivar had not only strengthened his power in the domain of Northumbria itself, but he had secretly arranged for landing in Britain from Denmark, as well as Norway, great hosts of warriors under the most desperate vikings to aid him in subduing the island.

When (869) all arrangements were complete, Ivar made a raid across Mercia, thence into the fen district of Lincolnshire, crossing into East Anglia. In this whole march he again expressed his bitter hatred

for the odious cross by burning all Christian buildings in his path and committing the most outrageous acts of vandalism and murder. Lincolnshire was made the first point of attack because the fleets containing his allies were to land along its shores and the southern banks of the Humber, as well as in Norfolk.

Be it said to the shame of the King who should have put forth every effort to protect his subjects in the shire, that he did not lift a hand to stay the ravages of the invader. Like Charles the Bald in his castle of Saint Denis at Paris, when besieged by Hastings, he thought only of his own barren life, to save which he cringed and begged for mercy at the feet of a pirate, while those who demanded his protection, at any cost, were being slaughtered like sheep. But if the fen country of Lincolnshire was ruled over by a cowardly king, it had an earl within its borders who was no coward.

Earl Elgar gathered around him every man who could bear arms, and sallied forth from the marshy district called Holland, over which he ruled as Earl, determined to make a manly resistance against the advance of the spoiling Ivar. His bravery aroused the fighting blood of Morcard, the Lord of Brunne, and other noblemen, including Osgot, Sheriff of the

county, and these being joined by Toliuss, the fighting monk of Crowland, with his band of fugitives, made up a force which even Ivar might hesitate to attack, especially as the reinforcements expected by him from the incoming viking fleets were slow to arrive.

Ivar left Thetford, his permanent camp in the south of Norfolk, crossed the little river Wissey, skirted around the marshy lands of the Wash, and entered Boston, in Lincolnshire. Thence he travelled southwest with a view of robbing the monasteries at Crowland and Peterborough, and again to attack the Mercian stronghold of Nottingham.

Having learned that there was a force prepared to give him battle, he protected himself by earth ramparts, and went forth to meet the enemy. Earl Elgar's marshmen, as they were called, with some Mercians, proved to be no mean band of fighting men. They were well armed and, moreover, were fighting for their homes, which the vandal hand of the Dane was burning and robbing with impunity.

Soon the clash of arms came and the onslaught was bitter and bloody; but so heroically did Earl Elgar's men, led by so brave a chief, fight, that Ivar's warriors were compelled to seek shelter behind their earthworks, after leaving no less than three Scandian kings dead upon the field, as well as



many earls, while the ground was covered with the bodies of Danish warriors. This defeat angered Ivar. Vikings who were now landing in large numbers, only a few miles distant, were hurried into the Danish camp.

The next morning the conflict was renewed with many fresh men in Ivar's ranks. The fight till evening was savage and deadly, sometimes favoring the Danes, then the forces of Elgar. So desperately hot did the battle rage, that some of the Saxon allies became panic-stricken and fled. The remnant, principally marshmen under the Earl, formed themselves into a compact body in the shape of a wedge, repelling every Danish attack of horse, spear, and sword, and with their shields completely protected themselves from the enemy's arrows.

The valor of the men of Lincolnshire amazed Ivar—it was a resistance he had no thought of encountering. His army very much outnumbered Elgar's remnant and therefore the resisters must be beaten at all hazards. Towards nightfall, the Scandians feigned flight; the marshmen shouted a jubilant cry—the solid wedge scattered and rushed wildly in pursuit. The voice of victory now arose from the ranks of Ivar. Quicker than words can express it, the duped pursuers, in chaotic mass, were surrounded by solid

columns of Northmen, from which escape was impossible. The slaughter began, and if the facts of this battle are truthfully given in history, scarcely a man escaped with his life. Earl Elgar and every leader was slaughtered on this night of fearful carnage, the bloody spot being now marked by the name of Algarkirk,<sup>1</sup> just south of Boston in Lincolnshire. With such a scene of butchery in the darkness it would seem that Ivar and his men would have had a surfeit of blood. Not so, however, for, when convinced that not a man in the enemy's ranks remained alive, they hurried southward to the sacred old monastery of Crowland, reinforced by a large number of vikings who had just landed at Boston, even more thirsty for shedding Christian blood than the remnant of Ivar's forces, who were naturally exhausted with fatigue from the effects of the terrible encounter.

The tidings of Elgar's defeat and the slaughter of himself and his whole army reached Crowland Abbey less than an hour before its grounds and buildings were completely encircled by Ivar's warriors. Meantime all but the abbot, a few monks, and the extra daring and aged had fled for refuge, mostly in boats into the high marsh-grasses, some distance from the

<sup>1</sup> Spelt Algarkirk instead of Elgarkirk ; either is correct.

abbey. In its immediate vicinity the whole surroundings were like a great garden of beauty. Although the land was marshy and wet, through the skill, thrift, industry, and excellent taste of the priests and other attachés of the buildings the cultivation of trees, vines, vegetables, and flowers had within these hallowed grounds attained a degree of perfection scarcely equalled in any other part of Britain.

It is not necessary to recount in detail what followed. Every creature in the abbey, save one, was killed on the spot, including abbot, monks, women, children, as well as the aged and infirm, many of whom were when attacked kneeling at the altar in the attitude of prayer. Every article of value was carried away, the buildings laid in ashes, and the beautiful gardens and grounds utterly destroyed. With the one remarkable exception mentioned, not a human life did the blood-stained hand of the Dane spare. That was a boy who bore the name of Thurgar, whom Sidroc, a Danish earl, led away alive, and who afterwards escaped to tell the story of the awful sights he had seen on that night of sword and fire at Crowland.

The Scandians who had been through the long and hotly contested battle at Algarkirk were jaded and worn out; hence, after pillaging and burning

Crowland, they craved rest. The large body of Norwegians, however, who had recently landed on the eastern coast under command of Rollo, son of Earl Rognwald, the most desperate young viking afloat, were not content to remain inactive for an hour. Their first taste of blood was at Crowland, and their thirst for more was intense. The whole army, therefore, moved south over the fen roads to Peterborough, and while the battle-scarred men encamped a little north of the famous abbey, the new recruits marched on to destroy it.

With the exception of Winchester, and possibly Canterbury, there was not in the whole of Britain such a venerated temple or a collection of more precious relics, beautiful and costly altar-service, and highly treasured and ancient scrolls of the nation's history than were at this time contained within the walls of this sacred abbey, itself an object of admiration in the long list of consecrated buildings of Europe.

The abbot had already been warned of the approach of the dreaded enemy, and had thoroughly armed every man for miles around who would volunteer to aid in defending the building, so dear to every Christian heart, as well as to protect his own fireside.

The flames which arose from the destruction of Crowland, so plainly seen in the darkness over the flat fens, only six or eight miles distant, was the final warning to prepare for the defence of Peterborough. Every building was surrounded by rows of armed men, with the abbot as their leader and the spirit to inspire them with courage. Long before the flames began to grow dim over the ruins of their neighbor's home to the north, the tramp of the Scandian was heard in the stillness of the night, over the hard roads across the morass which separated the two places.

Because of the known daring and cruelty of the enemy, whom they must in a few minutes be prepared to attack, many hearts in the defending ranks beat quickly. Louder and louder sounded the tread of the approaching host; then, in the glimmer of the star-light, could be seen their shining armor and glittering weapons as they rose and fell to the step of the marcher.

In a flash, which startled the defenders, the file of torch-bearers in the rear of the first column of Scandian axe- and swordsmen, threw a blaze of light upon both friend and foe. The combat started so quickly that the men of Peterborough at once began to waver when they saw man after man fall to their

right and to their left, while their own shields were inflicting cruel wounds upon their bodies, caused by the fearful blows of the Northman's axe. Above the cries and shrieks of the dying and wounded, could be heard the sweet voice of the abbot: "*Fight for Christ and your home!*" The contest was terribly unequal; in fifteen minutes every defender was either dead, mortally wounded, or had fled from the conflict in dismay.

The godly abbot and many of the monks lay in the silence of death at the façade of the abbey, where they had fallen manfully in defence of the building so dear to their hearts. The amount of pillage was enormous, when compared with that of Crowland.

Every article of value was soon in possession of the marauders, and the temple, with its surrounding buildings, including their priceless historical treasures, which had been purchased at the cost of centuries of precious time, were the prey of the vandal hand and the torch long before the sun rose upon another day.

As flame and smoke began to encircle the apsis and altar of the abbey,—both artistic gems,—several monks were seen descending a private stairway under the altar. "They are escaping by a secret

exit," shouted Rollo, as his manly young face, worthy of a better cause, was lit up by the increasing brightness of the flames within the building. He waved a signal for several torch-bearers to follow him, who were joined by a band of warriors, and with them this youthful leader, with his well-known daring, rushed down the private passageway.

Very small secret doors in numbers were found, after a long and tedious search. They were made in such exact imitation of the surrounding stone walls that it was only by accident that their existence was discovered. In the meantime the fire above was becoming hotter and hotter, making their escape back through the abbey one of great danger. They looked into the dark, mysterious passages through the tiny doors they had found, then up the mite of an exit by which they had descended, now filled with smoke, through which could be seen the fierce glare of the flames, increasing in brightness and intensity of heat, becoming more unbearable every moment. The torch-bearers and warriors were on the point of suffocation from smoke. They all rushed to the narrow steps leading to the abbey, but the smoke and intense heat drove them back. "To the private doors below," shouted Rollo, who was fast losing his power of utterance, if not his

mind. Search was again made for the secret openings, but they were all tightly closed, and to find them again in the blinding fumes was a doubtful task. In despair they groped blindly around the walls. The smoke and heat were rapidly choking them. At last a door was found and quickly opened. The torch-bearers, half-suffocated, rushed in, followed by Rollo and his warriors. It was instantly shut to keep back the dreadful smoke and heat.

Onward they crept through this low, narrow, mysterious passage, filled with tortuous mazes, bewildered as to any escape ahead of them and feeling that certain death would claim them if they returned. The rash daring of youth had entrapped the bold young Viking. Along the crooked viaduct the torchmen crept, with lowered heads and bent backs, followed by Rollo and his warriors, wrapt in a silence oppressive enough to fill every heart with gloom.

After travelling several hundred feet they no longer smelt the terrible smoke which had so nearly taken their lives, and felt that they were now out of the reach of danger from fire; so they began to feel hopeful of final escape. To the right and to the left they passed little chambers in the walls, containing all manner of boxes and articles of every



description. The mazes under Egyptian Memphis could not be more puzzling.

So far, however, not a trace of a human being had been met with, nor the sound of a human voice heard. Pillage no longer attracted them; their only thought was to make good their escape and save their lives. The passage, which, from its cramped dimensions, had seemed without end, at last terminated. Dead walls were on every side. A close examination disclosed a small stone stairway leading upwards. So steep and narrow was it that a full-grown person could scarcely crowd himself through, without danger of becoming wedged in.

Rollo's caution here sounded the alarm. "Doubtless," he whispered "our enemies are stationed at the exit above, prepared to kill each one of us as we thrust our heads through this narrow trap." A short council of war was held and a torch-bearer who was almost too thin to make a shadow was ordered to go up first and blaze the way. After an ascent of a few steps he entered a small chamber, in the corner of which were crouched the forms of five females, whose faces were blanched from fear. Each wore the gray suit of the "Band of Mercy," with the emblem of the white cross upon the breast of each.

The companions from below were hailed and, led by the torch-bearers, all finally succeeded in crowding through the cramped entrance. The well-known maxim in Scandian warfare now confronted Rollo and his men: "No object or person bearing the mark of the odious cross must escape destruction or death."

The full blaze of every torch fell upon this group of terrorized creatures. The warriors advanced with uplifted weapons, with Rollo in front. Just as an axe was about to fall upon the head of a doomed victim, the white arm of the woman crouched in front was raised high in the air. Upon it glistened the sacred bracelet of Odin. The lifelike coil of the Midgard-Serpent encircled her arm, dangling to which were the figures of Odin's eight-footed horse, and that of the hallowed Valkyr, holding in her hand the glittering spear, all exquisitely wrought in gold and precious stones, the reputed gifts of the gods.

Rollo stepped suddenly backwards, and held his hands high above his head, the signal to stop; then, in a low voice commanded that all these lives be spared in the name of Odin. He then fell upon his knees in front of the woman wearing the sacred bracelet, and laying aside his sword, whispered softly, "*Egberta!*"

The beauty and sweetness of the face which was

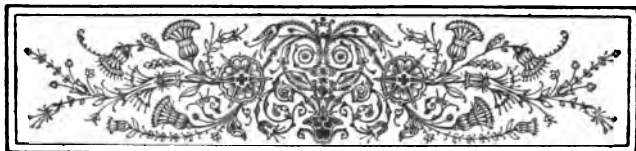
turned towards him was enhanced by the look of alarm stamped upon it. Her only answer was, "*Rollo!*" spoken in a voice calm and soft. It was the Princess, who some years before had secretly nursed this young man, then a beardless boy of seventeen, who had been wounded by a Saxon arrow at Canterbury. So captivated was this youth by his beautiful, kind-hearted nurse that he then declared, upon the sacred bracelet, that if she would consent to be his wife he would become a Christain.

To this Egberta turned a deaf ear, declaring in a tone which Rollo could not fail to understand, that she would never marry, but would remain single her entire life and follow the dictates of her heart in nursing the sick and wounded and ministering to the poor.

So tenderly had Egberta cared for this boy that in his gratitude he placed upon her arm, when bidding her adieu, the thing most sacred to every Scandian, his bracelet of Odin. "The sight of this will ever protect you," said Rollo, "against harm from any Northman." It was this sacred relic which met Rollo's eyes when her white arm was uplifted—a signet as hallowed and powerful with the ancient Scandian as the royal ring and seal is to the Oriental king.

After being directed by Egberta to the way of escape, Rollo and his torchmen and warriors, bade the five Sisters of Mercy adieu, and a little before daylight joined their companions, who supposed they had perished in the abbey.





## CHAPTER XXIII

**T**O recount the horrors which the multiplied hordes of Scandians inflicted upon the whole of Britain for the eight years following Algarkirk, Crowland, and Peterborough, would merely repeat, on a gigantic scale, what these three represent as mere types. It is only necessary to say that immediately after the outrage at Peterborough, Northmen, both Danes and Norwegians, began to pour in upon the island like devouring grasshoppers.

As before stated, they no longer came with the object of plunder, but to possess the land and make the present owners their slaves. With the feeble opposition that they encountered, they soon succeeded in planting themselves as lords of the soil over the whole island, save in Wessex and Wales.

That this stalwart, warlike, and aggressive race never let go of their grasp upon Britain, is made patent by the character of the people who now occupy the northern counties of England. They

scarcely bear any resemblance either in physical form, complexion, or language to the inhabitants of Wales and what was then Wessex, or even to the original Angles.

In short, it is a reasonable conclusion to reach, that the Northmen *then*, even more completely than by the second Danish conquest forty years later, in a great measure supplanted the Angle in the ownership of territory over every foot occupied by him; it being pretty well established by history that the Angle never colonized either in Wessex or Wales—his home was confined to territory farther north, his entering wedge being East Anglia.

The invader, however, was not content with seven eighths of the island. He craved the whole. Hence, soon after their victories in the north, they invaded Wessex, capturing and occupying as headquarters the walled city of Reading, which gave them not only an excellent location for making land sallies, but also afforded them direct communication with the sea by the river Thames.

At this point arises a question which I suppose no person save Alfred himself could answer. Why did Ethelred and Alfred remain entirely inactive for nearly a year, while the Scandian was securely planting himself upon the island ?

Moreover, every aggressive step which had been taken by the Dane and his allies was in violation of the sacred compact entered into between Ethelred, Alfred, and Ivar, at Nottingham. Was the King of Wessex afraid of the Northman ? Or did he regard him of too little consequence to organize a campaign to compel obedience to the treaty ?

The masterly inactivity of Alfred up to the conquest of Reading by Ivar displays as great weakness in his character as the last years of his life developed wisdom, power, greatness, and towering virtues. Aside from the treaty obligation between Ethelred, Alfred, and Ivar, the oath taken by every king of Wessex made him swear that he would protect the interests of Mercia and Northumbria against foreign aggression, in common with his own throne.

Whatever may have been the reasons for this policy of inaction upon the part of Wessex, I have no doubt Alfred afterwards bitterly regretted consenting to it. Ethelred dying from a wound received at the battle of Merton, soon after the Northman invaded his kingdom, Alfred thereafter became his successor, in the end making the wisest, best, and most picturesque King that ever reigned in Britain.

So engrossed was Alfred in defending his king-

dom against its invaders that he hurried from his brother's grave to engage them in battle at Wilton, without even going through the ordeal of coronation, so far as the records of Winchester show. The first few battles which Alfred fought with the Scandian were terribly bloody, with success more or less upon his side.

But to kill ten thousand of the enemy meant nothing, for in a few days double that number of fresh recruits would arrive to take their places. Battle after battle saw Alfred's forces growing smaller and smaller, while the Northman's ranks were always full. Driven from place to place by his bitter foe, defeated whenever he met him in open field, Alfred lost hope and courage, and his dwindling followers shared his despair.

Tribute after tribute was given to the Scandian to withdraw from Wessex, which they solemnly agreed to do; but a pledge was kept only for a short time, then openly violated. In the late autumn of 877 the army of Alfred was in a deplorable condition. The Scandians swarmed over his kingdom like locusts, leaving nothing for the native tiller of the soil to sustain life.

The invader took everything, and slew all who disputed his right. Many bishops, priests, and



monks had gathered all valuables from the monasteries and churches and sailed away to other shores to save their lives and seek peace. Some of the earls, too, who should have remained staunch and loyal to the cause of Wessex, had also left the country. So had many freemen, who saw there was no protection in their own land for either their lives or property.

The whole island was in the cruel and relentless grasp of the heathen. All appeals from Alfred for recruits to his fighting band—it was no longer worthy the name of an army—were unheeded. One by one the few unfed and unclothed adherents deserted him, leaving him at last absolutely alone. Without bishop, monk, or counsellor to keep him company, Alfred lost all heart, all hope. As suddenly as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up, the King and his Queen disappeared.

For several months his whereabouts was a dark mystery, even to his few friends who still had hoped for his final success. The people of Wessex had already bent their necks to the cruel invaders, preferring to subsist on their doubtful mercy than to fight longer against fate.

Meantime, Alfred, with a few unkempt bushwhackers, had hidden themselves upon the little

island of Athelney, located in the centre of a dreary swamp and surrounded by overflow water from the rivers Parret and Yoe. Marsh-grass and forbidding briers and bushes quite encircled it.

On this lonely, desolate mound, the King of Wessex and his family lived with their uncouth companions during the winter of 877-8. What a change from the palace of a king to the mud hut of a bushwhacker!





## CHAPTER XXIV

ONLY upon the theory that Alfred felt within him the power of a Titan, who cast the mountain into the valley to exhibit his strength in replacing it, can his failure to nip the Danish invasion in the bud be explained.

The Titan he proved himself to be. Humiliated and crushed to a degree which few previous kings had ever reached, he rose to a pinnacle of greatness, goodness, and fame which it has rarely been the lot of the historian to record of any other monarch. Truly, the brilliancy of the gem was brought out by the number of rude tools worn out in polishing it.

The isle of Athelney could not grow food enough to feed a crow. Upon what, then, were the King's family and their rude retainers to live? There were only two doors open—to beg or steal. While the latter would brand them as outlaws, the former would degrade them to vagrants. Which?

They chose to become thieves rather than the

despised objects of charity. For several months, then, Alfred the Great and his Queen lived upon the outlaw's bread. What terrible feelings of chagrin must have tortured the King's heart for violating the very laws he himself had made and held so sacred.

To have performed what he afterwards did, Alfred's mind must have been extremely active during the few months he was hidden in that dismal swamp. Many stories are told of his experience there, some doubtless true, while the truth of others may be open to doubt. After all, so-called history, especially that buried under many centuries of time, often rests upon the weak basis of a fable. Therefore the wholesale rejection of legends by the assumed true historian often robs a noble character of that which would exalt his name, and possibly contain as much truth as what would otherwise be written down as solid history.

There is not a doubt that Alfred's mind was ever active during all these winter months, amidst the squalor which surrounded him. If Dame Legend has not drawn too much upon her fancy, Alfred, dressed in the most lowly garb of the peasant, travelled much alone. He would in the early morning paddle himself over from the island in a

common *dugout*, picking his way through the rushes, tall rank grass, and briers, and wander all day in the surrounding country. He would mingle freely with those of his adherents whom he knew, but who then knew him not.

In this way he learned the feeling of the people towards him. Often would he berate King Alfred for his cruel desertion of his people, only to be fiercely threatened for disloyalty by those with whom he was talking. Sometimes he would venture very close to the camp of the enemy, and talk with straggling Scandians, who would generally show a scornful lip at the mention of King Alfred, declaring he was already in a foreign land, a cowardly deserter of his own kingdom.

One of his favorite jaunts—quite a long one—was northward over the valleys of the little rivers Brue and Axe. Then he would climb the high Chedder Mountains, and look down upon Bristol Channel, a few miles to the west. Here he would sit for hours, watching for the incoming or outgoing craft of the Northmen, who so often made Bristol the objective point for plunder. Nothing that he saw or heard would he fail to treasure carefully in his mind, all to be written down when he returned to Athelney.

He rather shunned than courted the company of his adherents; he loved to be alone. Chedder Mountains, in all their wildness, soon became his favorite retreat. Day after day he would wander here and there upon their summits. Wrapped in his coarse, thick garments, he could defy the cold blasts and gusts of snow which so often swept over them.

If these hills had been a magnet and he the obedient needle, the attraction could not have become stronger. True, from their heights he gained much information about the movement of the enemy's boats; but aside from this there was something about them which drew him towards them as if by the charm of fascination. The walk from Athelney was a long one, yet, heedless of this, he never failed to visit this spot of his choice once or twice a week or even oftener.

The winter months were at an end. The equinoctial day in March had been reached; still the wind blew damp and chilly over the waters about Athelney. Early in the morning Alfred, as usual, paddled his way over the dreary marshes, and before noon found himself upon the Chedder Mountains. Scarcely an hour had passed before the sky became thick with overhanging clouds that began to send

down a cold, misty rain, quite hiding the view of Bristol Channel. With the rain came heavy gusts of wind, first from one point, then from another.

Alfred began to shake from the effects of the penetrating atmosphere. During his previous visits he had found many retreats under projecting rocks, enclosed by thick shrubs and brambles. He hastily sought one of his old covers, and to warm his chilly blood he took a draught of beer with which he was provided. To him the place where he had taken shelter did not have a familiar look, though he had prided himself that he knew every nook and corner in the mountains. So completely was this place enclosed by rock and shrubbery that he could scarcely discern the outside light. The beer had warmed his blood and soon he felt its cheering effect.

His curiosity was now aroused to prospect further. After walking quite a distance under complete protection, he reached a point where his way was barred by stone and earth. There was an inlet to the right. Feeling in the humor for diving into anything new, he entered this opening, which like his first shelter came abruptly to an end. Groping a little farther to the left, however, he discovered a small opening which appeared to lead to the interior of the mountain itself.

Into this he made his way cautiously, until he had travelled by a slight incline quite a distance. The darkness had become intense, but by glancing backwards he could just discern the struggling light at the mouth where he had entered.

As far as he had travelled, the road inwards appeared to be quite level. He feared to proceed any further, not knowing what great chasm he might fall into. He sat down and began to wonder. It now occurred to him to test his voice. He shouted with all his might, "Will King Alfred ever overcome his enemies?" The first returning echo of his words was almost deafening. The second seemed to come from a great distance within the bowels of the earth but was of less volume. The third was much fainter, but equally far-reaching; and when it died away other sounds followed, in which Alfred's ears, doubtless aided by a little superstition, thought he detected the word *Yes!*







## CHAPTER XXV

**W**HEN Alfred began the descent of the mountainside and turned his face southward towards Athelney the sun had already set and the gloomy sky drew a dark curtain over what little twilight fell upon the opposite side of the clouds. But though late, and the journey of nearly a score of miles was a long one, Alfred had never before left his favorite haunt with so light a heart and so firm a step.

Have the records of the past ever furnished an instance of one with a heart so stout or a mind so great who did not at some time, especially in the hour of adversity, seek comfort in the shadowy realms of fairyland, listening to the voice which never spoke except in the fancy of the listener ?

Every few steps downward, Alfred would stop and look back at the spot where he had entered the cave. The voice of the returning echo still sounded in his ears, and above all he thought he could hear

that sweet word, *Yes*! He did not reach his island home until near midnight; and after partaking of his frugal supper spent another hour collecting his records, rolls of Scripture, candles, tinder-box, harp, provisions, and other needed articles to complete his pack for an early return to Chedder in the morning.

If within Alfred's nature there was one trait of character stronger than another, it was his ability to keep his own counsel. He always maintained that a secret was no secret at all if in the keeping of two persons.

In the morning he was unusually cheerful; so much so that the Queen and the whole household could not fail to notice it. It was no unusual thing for the King to be absent one or even two nights from Athelney. So when he left word that he might possibly not return for two or three days, it created no surprise. Possessed of a marvellous faculty for traversing with ease pathless forest thickets, he readily found the cave entrance next morning which he had discovered the previous day.

Before proceeding far inward he sat down and prepared to use the flint and steel upon his tinder, and soon succeeded in lighting two wax candles, for which he had made rude holders out of blocks of

wood. As every minute the light from the candles grew brighter, strange objects came in sight which to Alfred were quite new. The stalagmite floor sloped inward with only a slight incline. On its left side was a gully, deep enough to make treacherous travelling in the dark, which the King had fortunately escaped the day before.

This vestibule, with not a very high ceiling, was hung with stalactites of various lengths and in shape almost countless. Reaching quite an abrupt termination at the end of a few hundred feet, a choice was offered to turn either to the right or to the left, as avenues seemed to lead in both directions. Alfred chose the right. After walking on a somewhat smooth bottom with a steep slope downward for perhaps an eighth of a mile or more, through an avenue which was neither wide nor high, but beautifully adorned by stalatitic pendants, he found himself within a large hall, whose ceiling was so high that the dim light from the two candles failed to penetrate so great a distance.

To Alfred's amazement, there was very little debris on the floors, or grime and dirt upon the walls. Through an opening not much larger than a small door, leading from this great hall, he passed into a much smaller chamber with a low ceiling.

In the centre was a large flat table of stalagmite, around which were placed four chairs of the same material, as if put there by the orderly hand of man.

Upon this table he placed his large pack and his harp; then, at either end, the two candles. Glancing around at this room, which could lay claim to much adorned beauty, he could not persuade himself that it was merely an accident of nature. He listened for the slightest sound. There was none. The stillness was so oppressive that he could count the beats of his own heart. He looked upward to the ceiling, and repeated to himself aloud: "What peace to be so far away from the voice of man, but so near to the voice of God." His words came echoing back so distinctly that for the moment he was startled at the sound of his own voice, in which the last word, *God*, rang out with peculiar clearness. Then was sent up to the Great Ruler of all things a long prayer of thanks for directing his steps into this retreat, away from the world and its cruel struggles, where he could be alone with his Maker.

Unrolling the vellum copy of the Psalms written in Latin, he read them aloud from the first to the last word. From the beginning to the end he found in David a duplicate of his own life, beset on all

sides with trials and tribulations, the infliction of cruel enemies. But in none of these sacred words did he find the mention of persecutions, without the promise of deliverance and victory in language even stronger. Never since buoyant childhood had Alfred felt so happy. His long walk had made him hungry; he unwrapped the package of coarse food he had brought with him, and soon finished a meal which he enjoyed with great zest.

Half an hour was spent in a deliberate mental review of his past life, especially dwelling upon his years of failure as king. The towering faith of David had rebuked him. Upon the life which lay before him he now looked with a vision entirely changed. He had been leaning upon the power of Alfred, instead of upon the arm of Alfred's Creator.

He unfolded the bulky package of vellum which had kept company with the rolls of the Psalms. It was his manual, a record of his life and acts since he was able to write.

A glance at one of the candles, which he always carefully marked in twelve equal sections of two hours each, showed him to his surprise that he had been within the cave more than eight hours. He spread the manual upon the table with the intention of glancing it over. "Why should I go to that

trouble?" he asked himself. "I know by rote every word in it." He then spread the sheets upon the table, with the writing downwards. For one hour he mentally went over the familiar contents of these records, with his eyes fixed upon the dimly lighted roof above. Vividly his every act was passed in review.

The cave air proved to him exhilarating. His thoughts during his short stay within it had been more active than at any time since his early youth. The reading of the Psalms and the review of his life had spread before him such vivid pictures that every word and thought flitted before him like living scenes in life. His walk from Athelney had not tired his limbs nor had the great mental strain of the past few hours exhausted his power of thought.

Suddenly, however, the feeling came over him that with a person of his weakly frame he had imposed upon himself too great a load. Then came a twinge of attack from his thorn in the flesh, an epileptic affliction which had pursued him from his childhood. Away from all who could care for him in one of those hours of distress, he took from his pocket a preparation which he always carried to ward off its agonizing pains. The dose was a large one. The threatened symptoms passed away, his

mind became even clearer and more active than before.

He now placed a garment at the back of the chair upon which to rest his head, and again fixed his eyes upon the ceiling. His body and mind were wrapped in complete repose. The desire to think had left him. In this state of ecstatic calm, his heart rather than his mind talked with God. Then followed the gentle sleep of peace, a thing to which for months he had been a stranger. From this he was awakened by a voice, sweet but loud, calling the name "*Alfred!*"

The little chamber was filled with an intense light, bright as silver. Directly over his head, midway between himself and the ceiling, floated a cloud of blue. Within it was the figure of his late friend, Edmund, King of East Anglia, with a face radiant with the glow of heaven. Above him hovered two angels in the act of placing upon his head a golden crown.

As this scene gradually faded from view, there appeared in its place another cloud, black as ink, and within it was the figure of the same Edmund, stripped of his royal robes, bound to a tree, and from his naked body was streaming blood drawn by the cruel lashes of his captors. Then came thick and fast a hundred arrows, piercing his writhing

body, from which the merciful axe of Ivar severed the head. Traced in letters of blood over this tree were the words, "Last of the Saxon kings in East Anglia, who died for refusing to renounce Christ and become a vassal to a heathen ruler."

Then floated in the intense light the terrified figure of Burhed of Mercia, with hordes of fierce Northmen in pursuit, seeking his life. He eludes them and finds refuge within the walls of a place whose gates fly open at his approach. Above this city of safety is written, *Rome*.

At the next scene the body of Alfred is almost convulsed. The cloud, which is still black, has increased many fold in size. Myriads of Scandians, with visages fierce and determined, armed with the cruel weapons of war, and with the flaming torch in their hands, are upon his own soil of Wessex. The inner walls surrounding the royal city of Reading teem with the invaders. One of Alfred's trusted earls is giving them battle and defeats them. The warriors of both the invader and the defender forsake the field of carnage. Then moving amongst the slain and wounded of both friend and foe is seen a familiar figure,—his own cousin Egberta, followed by her small army of litter-bearers to carry away the wounded.



Alfred tries to rise and rush to the earl's assistance, but his body seems chained to the chair. His terrified eyes and inflamed mind alone are blessed with the power of action. These are abnormally acute. The climax of surprises had not yet been reached. He now beheld his own form and that of his brother Ethelred at the gates of Reading. After a desperate encounter, the enemy who had issued forth to engage them was driven within the walls.

After a rest they are again seen pouring out of the gates like savage wolves. Alfred looks aghast at his own wavering army yielding foot by foot to the fierce onslaught of the Scandians. Then comes the rout in which the forces of Wessex seek safety by flight over the Thames at Windsor. The scene is so realistic a picture of that in which Alfred had actually taken part, that he struggled frantically but in vain to rise from his chair. He becomes reconciled and calmer when he sees before him his forces in complete order and array for once more engaging the enemy. Again he beholds himself and his brother Ethelred advancing with confident mien toward Ashdown.

He is looking upon his own uneasy figure moving from column to column, chafing at the delay of Ethelred, who has supreme command. His eyes

now fall upon his brother's tent, where Ethelred is calmly kneeling in the attitude of prayer to the God of war for the success of the arms of Wessex.

Alfred looks with a rebuking stare upon himself as to his chagrin, he vents his impatience and rushes upon the defiant foe before the arrival of Ethelred to order the attack. His brother now joins him, and together they climb step by step the hill of vantage, covered by the sacred ash of Odin, upon which the Northmen are massed in great numbers, hurling upon the heads of the advancing Saxons their arrows, spears, and axes with deadly effect. Upward and upward Alfred watches his dauntless warriors march, with himself well in advance.

The clash of arms at close quarters becomes fiercer and fiercer. The dead and wounded Saxons mingle in heaps with those of the Scandian. The enemy flees and the Saxon pursues him to the gates of Reading. The slaughter on the route of flight is terrible.

Night had thrown her curtain over this field of blood when Alfred saw the little army of torches wending its way amongst the dead and the maimed, with Egberta at its head, bent on her mission of mercy. He is filled with joy at the crushing blow dealt the enemy. They cannot withstand so terrific

a defeat; they are doomed. Their final expulsion from Wessex is assured. Utterly crushed are these hopes when he sees five recruits for every dead Scandian fill the enemy's ranks, as if rising from the earth like phantoms.

These shifting scenes now come and go in rapid succession. Another battle, and the giant white horse cut in chalk, the emblem of the last Saxon victory, is veiled with the black pall of defeat; and the raven flutters its wings of success upon the Scandian banner. The battle of Merton follows with the Saxons again in retreat, with Ethelred wounded to death.

Then he sees plainly the crownless Alfred rushing from his brother's grave to meet defeat at Wilton. Rout follows rout. In vain offer of tribute follows offer. The Scandian cry is the whole island for Odin or nothing. Now, in despair, he is looking upon the swarm of warriors under the cruel Guthrum dealing the last blow. The whole island is at last in the grasp of the Northmen. Guthrum is firmly fixed within the walled city of Chippenham.

Alfred is looking upon himself, with his few despairing half-fed and half-clothed adherents, in hiding upon the dreary isle of Athelney. He is sitting alone upon Chedder Mountain, watching the viking

fleets floating in Bristol Channel heading towards Wales. The last picture, and he sees himself as in a mirror, seated at the table within the cave shrouded in a cloud of dreamy haze. He shakes off the strange stupor which had spread before him his past career so minutely.

The effects of the large dose of opiate had passed away and he was himself again. He examined the marks upon the tapers and found it was at least two hours past midnight. The absolute even temperature of the cave had preserved in his body unusual vigor. His mind was bright and clear. His appetite called for more food and he indulged it freely.

The more he revolved the strange vision over in thought, the more he felt that the future before him was bright. He rearranged his pack and prepared to leave the cave. He had entered it filled with despair; he was leaving it full of buoyant hope.





## CHAPTER XXVI

**A**S the new Alfred left the cave and passed over almost the highest peak in the mountain the first streaks of dawn were just shooting up in the east.

It was Easter morning. What a strange coincidence that Alfred should on this day, fraught with such precious memories, come forth from the bowels of the earth in the early dawn and gaze down upon a land buried in heathenism, with himself alone to hold up the cross. Every church, monastery, and school on the island is in ashes. The bishops, abbots, and teachers are scattered abroad like hunted sheep, and ignorance veils the whole of Britain, like a dense cloud. What heart would not quail at beholding such a picture. Yet Alfred was full of hope, joy, and happiness. He cast his eyes to the far northeast, and with the increasing light could just discern the walled city of Chippenham, within

which were encamped the forces of Guthrum, holding Wessex in the grip of Odin.

A voice seemed to speak to him and say, "Stretch forth thine hand and smite them in thy might." Again the voice whispered: "From the ruin of every temple and school shall spring two and this land shall blossom with prosperity. Education and order shall come out of ignorance and chaos; the laws of good Ina shall once more bless the island under the hand of Alfred."

With these and kindred thoughts keeping him company the King slowly descended the Chedder Mountain, reaching the bottom as the sun, on that beautiful spring morning, shone forth in all his might. Never had he travelled towards Althelney with so light a step. When he reached the marsh-bound island, the first tidings which greeted him was that Saxon Odda had encountered and killed Ubba the Dane at Cynwith Castle in Wales, routed his forces, and captured the most sacred flag possessed by the enemy,—the one woven by the hands of Ubba's three sisters, bearing the mystic figure of the raven, whose very presence was said to mean victory.

The few trusted adherents of the King were despatched through Somerset, Wilts, and Hampshire, and his forces multiplied in every district as the news

spread that Alfred was still alive and called upon every friend of the King to meet him at Brixton prepared for war. Before the middle of May a vast army had surrounded Chippenham, had encountered and beaten the forces of Guthrum. So signal was the defeat that within a fortnight the heathen king was on his knees before Alfred, pleading for terms of peace.

He promised not only to leave Wessex and return to East Anglia, but to become a vassal to Alfred and he and his principal earls would accept Christianity and promote it throughout his kingdom—which he did in good faith, assuming the name of Athelstan, Alfred becoming his sponsor at the change of his faith and name. His terms were submitted to the Witan and were promptly accepted.

Soon the kings of the whole island bent their knees to Alfred in vassalage, and Christianity slowly drove heathenism from the face of the land. Every hope which Alfred nursed within his heart on that Easter morning upon the Chedder heights was more than realized before his death. Sacred buildings and schools sprang up in every part of the island. Education made more rapid strides than even Alfred dreamed of. The laws of Ina were fully revived by the King, with the Mosaic Code as the corner-stone.

Never were better laws formulated or more rigidly enforced, than under the last years of Alfred's reign.

Asser, the Welsh monk, became to the great King what Alcuin had been to Charlemagne. The school at the royal palace at Winchester was truly a model, with Egberta within it to assist in keeping alive the sweet influence of her venerated Swithun. With the exception of a visit from the notorious Hastings, Alfred was not much troubled by pirates for the remainder of his reign. Thus Alfred died, with the banner of united England floating over the island, as Egbert had practically left it sixty-five years before.

Rollo, the Norwegian outlaw, had in the meantime devastated Frankland even more severely than Hastings had in previous years. There is no record that he ever molested Britain after his experience at Peterborough. He was a desperate character, and knowing that he could not again return home to Norway, from which he had been banished by King Harold, he so harassed Frankland that the Frankish King was at last compelled to grant him a portion of his domain, which became that beautiful part of France known as Normandy, and Rollo became its first duke.

About a century and a half after the death of



Alfred, October, 1066, the last conquest of Britain by the Northmen took place. William, the Norman conqueror, the sixth in direct descent from Rollo, invaded the island at Hastings, a place named after the dreaded outlaw. At this great battle Duke William fought against the Saxon King Harold—the name of the Norwegian King who had exiled his grandsire Rollo. But William the Conqueror came not to introduce Odin, his forefather's deity, as the god of Britain; he came to lift England to a higher and a purer Christianity, which he did through his sainted bishops, Anselm and Lanfranc.

After this last Scandian conquest, if not long before, England was dominated by the brains and will-power of the Northman. Hence, the people of the England of to-day, it would seem, are wrongly named. Instead of being called the Anglo-Saxon race, should they not be known as the Normo-Saxon ?

The original Angles were well known as domestic stay-at-homes, and until the Northman taught them how to build a boat they were almost strangers to its use, and even with one built to order they were not sailors enough to handle it with skill. While the Northman was a boat-builder by nature, and a sea-rover from choice, and it was his boat-build-

ing genius which constructed the famous navy of England, as it was his roving spirit which planted the flag of Britain upon every continent of the globe.

THE END.













